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APRIL'S LADY.

APRIL'S LADY.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HUNGERFORD,

AUTHOR OF

“MOLLY BAWN,” “PHYLLIS,” “A LIFE'S REMORSE.”
“HER LAST THROW,” ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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APRIL'S LADY.



“Must we part? or may I linger?
Wax the shadows, wanes the day.”
Then, with voice of sweetest singer,
That hath all but died away,
“Go,” she said, but tightened finger,
Said articulately “Stay!”

CHAPTER I.

“Philosophy triumphs easily over past and over future evils, but present evils triumph over philosophy.”

“A LETTER from my father,” says Mr. Monkton, flinging the letter in question across the breakfast-table to his wife.

“A letter from Sir George!” Her dark, pretty face flushes crimson.

“And *such* a letter after eight years of obstinate silence. There! read it,” says her husband, contemptuously. The contempt is all for the writer of the letter.

Mrs. Monkton taking it up, with a most honest curiosity, that might almost be termed anxiety, reads it through, and in turn flings it from her as though it had been a scorpion.

“Never mind, Freddy !” says she with a great assumption of indifference that does not hide from her husband the fact that her eyes are full of tears. “Butter that bit of toast for me before it is *quite* cold, and give Joyce some ham. Ham, darling ? or an egg ?” to Joyce, with a forced smile that makes her charming face quite sad.

“Have you two been married eight whole years ?” asks Joyce laying her elbows on the table, and staring at her sister with an astonished gaze. “It seems like yesterday ! What a swindler old Time is. To look at Barbara, one would not believe she could have been *born* eight years ago.”

“Nonsense !” says Mrs. Monkton laughing, and looking as pleased as married women—even the happiest—always do, when they

are told they look *unmarried*. "Why Tommy is seven years old."

"Oh! That's nothing!" says Joyce airily, turning her dark eyes, that are lovelier, if possible, than her sister's, upon the sturdy child who is sitting at his father's right hand. "Tommy, we all know, is much older than his mother. Much more advanced; more learned in the wisdom of *this* world; aren't you, Tommy?"

But Tommy, at this present moment, is deaf to the charms of conversation, his young mind being nobly bent on proving to his sister (a priceless treasure of six) that the salt-cellar planted between them, belongs *not* to her, but to him! This sounds reasonable, but the difficulty lies in making Mabel believe it. There comes the pause eloquent at last, and then, I regret to say, the free fight!

It might perhaps have been even freer, but for the swift intervention of the paternal relative, who, swooping down upon the two belligerents with a promptitude worthy of all

praise, seizes upon his daughter and in spite of her kicks, which are noble, removes her to the seat on his left hand.

Thus separated hope springs within the breasts of the lookers-on that peace may soon be restored ; and indeed, after a sob or two from Mabel, and a few passes of the most reprehensible sort from Tommy (entirely of the facial order), a great calm falls upon the breakfast-room.

“ When I was your age, Tommy,” says Mr. Monkton addressing his son, and striving to be all that the orthodox parent ought to be, “ I should have been soundly whipped if I had behaved to my sister as you have just now behaved to yours ! ”

“ You *haven't* a sister,” says Tommy, after which the argument falls flat. It is true, Mr. Monkton is innocent of a sister, but how did the little demon remember that so *àpropos*.

“ Nevertheless,” says Mr. Monkton. “ If I *had* had a sister, I *know* I should not have been unkind to her.”

“Then she'd have been unkind to you,” says Tommy, who is evidently not afraid to enter upon a discussion of the rights and wrongs of mankind with his paternal relative. “Look at Mabel ! And I don't care *what* she says,” with a vindictive glance at the angelic featured Mabel, who glares back at him with infinite promise of a future settlement of all their disputes in her ethereal eyes. “'Twas *my* salt-cellar, not hers !”

“Ladies first—pleasure afterwards,” says his father somewhat idly.

“Oh *Freddy* !” says his wife.

“Seditious language, *I* call it,” says Jocelyne with a laugh.

“Eh ?” says Mr. Monkton. “Why what on earth have I been saying, now. I quite believed I was doing the heavy father to perfection and teaching Tommy his duty.”

“Nice duty,” says Jocelyne, with a pretence at indignation, that makes her charming face a perfect picture. “Teaching him to regard us as second best ! I like that.”

“Good Heavens ! did I give that impression. I must have swooned,” says Mr. Monkton penitently. “When last in my senses I thought I had been telling Tommy that he deserved a good whipping ; and that if good old Time could so manage as to make me my own father, he would assuredly have got it.”

“Oh ! *your* father !” says Mrs. Monkton in a low tone ; there is enough expression in it however to convey the idea to everyone present that in her opinion her husband’s father would be guilty of any atrocity at a moment’s notice.

“Well, *'twas* my salt-cellar,” says Tommy again stoutly, and as if totally undismayed by the vision of the grandfatherly scourge held out to him. After all we none of us feel things much, unless they come personally home to us.

“Was it ?” says Mr. Monkton mildly. “Do you know, I really quite fancied it was mine.”

"What?" says Tommy, cocking his ear. He, like his sister, is in a certain sense a fraud. For Tommy has the face of a seraph with the heart of a hardy Norseman. There is nothing indeed that Tommy would not dare.

"Mine, you know," says his father, even more mildly still.

"No, it wasn't," says Tommy with decision, "it was at *my* side of the table. *Yours*, is over there."

"Thomas!" says his father, with a rueful shake of the head that signifies his resignation of the argument; "it is indeed a pity that I am *not* like my father!"

"Like him! Oh *no*," says Mrs. Monkton emphatically, impulsively; the latent dislike to the family who had refused to recognize her on her marriage with their son, taking fire at this speech.

Her voice sounds almost hard—the gentle voice, that in truth was only meant by Mother Nature to give expression to all things kind and loving.

She has leant a little forward and a swift flush is dyeing her cheek. She is of all women the youngest looking for her years ; as a matron indeed she seems absurd. The delicate bloom of girlhood seems never to have left her, but—as though in love of her beauty—has clung to her day by day. So that now, when she has known eight years of married life (and some of them deeply tintured with care—the cruel care that want of money brings), she still looks as though the morning of womanhood was as yet but dawning for her.

And this is because love the beautifier went with her all the way ! Hand in hand he has travelled with her on the stony paths that those who marry must undoubtedly pursue. Never once had he let go his hold, and so it is, that her lovely face has defied Time (though after all that obnoxious Ancient has not had yet much opportunity given him to spoil it), and at twenty-five she looks but a little older than her sister, who is just

eighteen, and seven years younger than she is.

Her pretty soft grey Irish eyes, that are as nearly *not* black as it is possible for them to be, are still filled with the dews of youth. Her mouth is red, and happy. Her hair—so distinctly chestnut as to be almost guilty of a shade of red in it here and there—covers her dainty head in rippling masses, that fall lightly forward, and rest upon a brow, snow-white, and low and broad as any Greek's might be.

She has spoken a little hurriedly, with some touch of anger. But quick as the anger was born, so quickly does it die.

“I shouldn't have said that, perhaps,” says she, sending a little tremulous glance at her husband from behind the urn. “But I couldn't help it. I can't *bear* to hear you say you would like to be like him.”

She smiles (a little, gentle, “don't-be-angry-with-me” smile, scarcely to be resisted by any man, and certainly not by her husband,

who adores her). It is scarcely necessary to record this last fact, as all who run may read it for themselves, but it saves time to put it in black and white.

“But why not, my dear?” says Mr. Monkton, magisterially. “Surely, considering all things, you have reason to be deeply grateful to Sir George. Why, then, abuse him?”

“Grateful! To Sir George! To your father!” cries his wife, hotly and quick, and——

“Freddy!” from his sister-in-law brings him to a full stop for a moment.

“Do you mean to tell me,” says he, thus brought to bay, “that you have nothing to thank Sir George for?” He is addressing his wife.

“Nothing, nothing!” declares she, vehemently, the remembrance of that last letter from her husband’s father that still lies, within reach of her view, lending a suspicion of passion to her voice

“Oh, my dear girl, *consider!*” says Mr. Monkton, lively reproach in his tone. “Has he not given you *me*, the best husband in Europe?”

“Ah, what it is to be modest,” says Joyce, with her little quick brilliant laugh.

“Well, it’s not true,” says Mrs. Monkton, who has laughed also, in spite of herself and the soreness at her heart. “He did *not* give you to me. You made me that gift of your own free will. I have, as I said before, nothing to thank him for.”

“I always think he must be a silly old man,” says Joyce, which seems to put a fitting termination to the conversation.

The silence that ensues annoys Tommy, who dearly loves to hear the human voice divine. As expressed by himself first, but if that be impracticable, well then by somebody else. *Anything* is better than dull silence.

“Is he that?” asked he, eagerly, of his aunt.

Though I speak of her as his aunt, I hope it will not be misunderstood for a moment that Tommy totally declines to regard her in any reverential light whatsoever. A play-mate, a close friend, a confidante, a useful sort of person, if you will, but certainly not an *Aunt*, in the general acceptation of that term. From the very first year that speech fell on them, both Mabel and he had refused to regard Miss Kavanagh as anything but a confederate in all their scrapes, a friend to rejoice with in all their triumphs; she had never been Aunt, never, indeed, even so much as the milder "Auntie" to them; she had been "Joyce," only, from the very commencement of their acquaintance. The united commands of both father and mother (feebly enforced) had been insufficient to compel them to address this most charming specimen of girlhood by any grown up title. To them their aunt was just such an one as themselves—only, perhaps, a little *more* so.

A lovely creature, at all events, and lovable

as lovely. A little inconsequent, perhaps, at times, but always amenable to reason, when put into a corner, and full of the glad laughter of youth.

“Is he what?” says she, now returning Tommy’s eager gaze.

“The best husband in Europe. He *says* he’s that,” with a doubtful stare at his father.

“Why, the *very* best, of course,” says Joyce, nodding emphatically. “Always remember that, Tommy. It’s a good thing to *be*, you know. *You’ll* want to be that, won’t you?”

But if she has hoped to make a successful appeal to Tommy’s noble qualities (hitherto, it must be confessed, carefully kept hidden), she finds herself greatly mistaken.

“No, I won’t,” says that truculent person distinctly. “I want to be a big general with a cocked hat, and to kill people. I don’t want to be a husband *at all*. What’s the good of that?”

“To pursue the subject would be to court defeat,” says Mr. Monkton meekly. He rises from the table, and seeing him move, his wife rises too.

“You are going to your study?” asks she, a little anxiously. He is about to say “no” to this, but a glance at her face checks him.

“Yes, come with me,” says he instead, answering the lovely silent appeal in her eyes. That letter has no doubt distressed her. She will be happier when she has talked it over with him—they two alone. “As for you, Thomas,” says his father, “I’m quite aware that you ought to be consigned to the Donjon keep after your late behaviour, but as we don’t keep one on the premises, I let you off this time. Meanwhile I haste to my study to pen, with the assistance of your enraged Mother, a letter to our landlord that will induce him to add one on at once to this building. After which we shall be able to incarcerate you at our pleasure (but

not at yours) on any and every hour of the day."

"Who's Don John?" asks Tommy, totally unimpressed, but filled with lively memories of those Spaniards and other foreign powers who have unkindly made more difficult his hateful lessons off and on.

CHAPTER II.

“No love lost between us.”

“WELL,” says Mr. Monkton, turning to his wife as the study (a rather nondescript place) is reached. He has closed the door and is now looking at her with a distinctly quizzical light in his eyes, and in the smile that parts his lips. “Now for it. Have no qualms. I’ve been preparing myself all through breakfast, and I think I shall survive it. You are going to have it out with me, aren’t you?”

“Not with *you*,” says she, returning his smile indeed, but faintly, and without heart, “that horrid letter! I felt I *must* talk of it to someone, and——”

“*I* was that mythical person. I quite understand. I take it as a special compliment.”

"I know it is hard on you, but when I am really vexed about anything, you know, I always want to tell you all about it."

"I should feel it a great deal harder if you *didn't* want to tell me about it," says he. He has come nearer to her and has pressed her into a chair—a dilapidated affair that if ever it *had* a best day has forgotten it by now—and yet for all that is full of comfort. "I am only sorry"—moving away again and leaning against the chimney piece—"that you should be so foolish as to let my father's absurd prejudices annoy you at this time of day."

"He will always have it in his power to annoy me," says she quickly. "That, perhaps," with a little burst of feeling, "is why I can't forgive him. If I could forget, or grow indifferent to it all, I should not have this *hurt* feeling in my heart. But he is your father, and though he is the most unjust, the cruellest man on earth, I still hate to think he should regard me as he does."

"There is one thing however you do forget," says Mr. Monkton gravely, "I don't want to apologize for him, but I would remind you that he has never seen you."

"That's only an aggravation of his offence," her colour heightening; "the very fact that he should condemn me unseen, unheard, adds to the wrong he has done me instead of taking from it." She rises abruptly and begins to pace up and down the room, the hot Irish blood in her veins afire. "No"—with a little impatient gesture of her small hand—"I *can't* sit still. Every pulse seems throbbing. He has opened up all the old wound, and——" She pauses and then turns upon her husband two lovely flashing eyes. "Why, *why* should he suppose that I am vulgar, lowly born, unfit to be your wife?"

"My darling girl, what can it matter what he thinks? A ridiculous headstrong old man in one scale, and——"

"But it does matter. I want to *convince*

him that I am not—not—what he believes me to be.”

“Then come over to England and see him.”

“No—Never ! I shall never go to England. I shall stay in Ireland always. My own land ; the land he despises ; the land whose people he detests because he knows nothing about them. It was one of his chief objections to your marriage with me, that I was an Irish girl !”

She stops short, as though her wrath and indignation and contempt is too much for her.

“Barbara,” says Monkton, very gently, but with a certain reproach, “do you know you almost make me think that you regret our marriage ?”

“No, I don’t,” quickly. “If I talked for ever I shouldn’t be able to make you think *that*. But——” She turns to him suddenly, and gazes at him through large eyes that are heavy with tears. “I shall

always be sorry for one thing, and that is—that you first met me where you did.”

“At your Aunt’s? Mrs. Burke’s?”

“She is *not* my Aunt,” with a little frown of distaste; “she is nothing to me so far as blood is concerned. Oh! Freddy.” She stops close to him, and gives him a grief-stricken glance. “I wish my poor father had been alive when first you saw me. That we could have met for the first time in the old home. It was shabby—faded”—her face paling now with intense emotion. “But you would have known at once that it *had been* a fine old place, and that the owner of it——” She breaks down, very slightly, almost imperceptibly, but Monkton understands that even one more word is beyond her.

“That the owner of it, like St. Patrick, came of decent people,” quotes he with an assumption of gaiety he is far from feeling. “My good child, I don’t want to see *anyone* to know that of you. You carry the sign

manual. It is written in large characters all over you."

"Yet I wish you had known me before my father died," says she, her grief and pride still unassuaged. "He was so unlike everybody else. His manners were so lovely. He was offered a Baronetcy at the end of that Whiteboy business, on account of his loyalty—that nearly cost him his life—but he refused it, thinking the old name good enough without a handle to it."

"Kavanagh, we all know, is a good name."

"If he had accepted that title he would have been as—the same—as your father." There is defiance in this sentence.

"*Quite* the same !"

"No, no, he would not," her defiance now changes into a sorrowful honesty. "Your father has been a Baronet for *centuries*, my father would have only been a Baronet for a few years."

"For centuries !" repeats Mr. Monkton with an alarmed air. There is a latent sense

of humour (or rather an appreciation of humour) about him that hardly endears him to the opposite sex. His wife, being Irish, condones it, because she happens to understand it, but there are moments, we all know, when even the very best and most appreciative women refuse to understand *anything*. This is one of them. "Condemn my father if you will," says Mr. Monkton, "accuse him of all the crimes in the calendar, but for *my* sake give up the belief that he is the real and original Wandering Jew. Debrett—Burke—either—of those immaculate people will prove to you that my father ascended his throne in——"

"You can laugh at me if you like, Freddy," says Mrs. Monkton with severity tempered with dignity; "but if you laughed until this day month you couldn't make me forget the things that make me unhappy."

"I don't want to," says Mr. Monkton, still disgracefully frivolous. "*I'm* one of the things and yet——"

“Don’t !” says his wife, so abruptly, and with such an evident determination to give way to mirth, coupled with an equally strong determination to give way to tears, that he at once lays down his arms.

“Go on then,” says he, seating himself beside her. She is not in the arm-chair now, but on an ancient and respectable sofa that gives ample room for the accommodation of two ; a luxury denied by that old curmudgeon the arm-chair.

“Well, it is this, Freddy. When I think of that dreadful old woman Mrs. Burke, I feel as though you thought she was a fair sample of the rest of my family. But she is *not* a sample ; she has nothing to do with us. An uncle of my mother married her, because she was rich, and there her relationship to us began and ended.”

“Still——”

“Yes, I know, you needn’t remind me, it seems burnt into my brain. I know she took us in after my father’s death, and

covered me and Joyce with benefits when we hadn't a penny in the world we could call our own. I quite understand, indeed, that we should have starved but for her, and yet—yet—” passionately, “I cannot forgive her for perpetually reminding us that we had *not* that penny !”

“It must have been a bad time,” says Monkton slowly. He takes her hand and smoothes it lovingly between both of his.

“She was vulgar. That was not her fault ; I forgive her that. What I can't forgive her, is the fact that you should have met me in her house.”

“A little unfair, isn't it ?”

“Is it ? You will always now associate me with her !”

“I shan't indeed. Do you think I have, up to this ? Nonsense ! A more absurd amalgamation I couldn't fancy.”

“She was not one of us,” feverishly. “I have never spoken to you about this, Freddy, since that first letter your father wrote to

you, just after our marriage. You remember it? And then, I couldn't explain somehow—but now—this last letter has upset me dreadfully; I feel as if it was all different, and that it was my duty to make you aware of the *real* truth. Sir George thinks of me as one beneath him; that is not true. He may have heard that I lived with Mrs. Burke and that she was my aunt; but if my mother's brother chose to marry a woman of no family, because she had money,"—contemptuously, "that might disgrace *him*, but would not make her kin to *us*. You saw her, you—" lifting distressed eyes to his—"You thought her dreadful, didn't you?"

"I have only had one thought about her. That she was good to you in your trouble, and that but for her, I should never have met you."

"That is like you," says she gratefully, yet impatiently. "But it isn't enough. I want you to understand that she is quite

unlike my own *real* people—my father, who was like a prince,” throwing up her head, “and my uncle, his brother.”

“You have an uncle, then?” with some surprise.

“Oh no, *had*,” sadly.

“He is dead then?”

“Yes, I suppose so. You are wondering,” says she quickly, “that I have never spoken to you of him or my father before. But I *could* not. The thought that your family objected to me, despised me, seemed to compel me to silence. And you—you asked me very little.”

“How could I, Barbara? Any attempt I made was repulsed. I thought it kinder to——”

“Yes—I was wrong. I see it now. But I couldn’t bear to explain myself. I told you what I could about my father, and that seemed to me sufficient. Your people’s determination to regard me as impossible, tied my tongue.”

"I don't believe it was that," says he laughing, "I believe we were so happy that we didn't care to discuss anything but each other. Delightful subjects full of infinite variety ! We have sat so lightly to the world all these years, that if my father's letter had not come this morning I honestly think we should never have thought about him again."

This is scarcely true, but he is bent on giving her mind a happier turn if possible.

"What's the good of talking to me like that, Freddy," says she reproachfully. "You know one never forgets anything of that sort. A slight I mean ; and from one's own family. You are always thinking of it ; you know you are."

"Well, not always my dear, certainly—" says Mr. Monkton temporizing. "And if ever I *do* give way to retrospection, it is to feel indignant with both my parents."

"Yes ; and I don't want you to feel like that. It must be dreadful, and it is my

fault. When I think how I felt towards my dear old dad, and my uncle—I——”

“Well, never mind that. I’ve got you, and without meaning any gross flattery, I consider you worth a dozen dads. Tell me about your uncle. He died?”

“We don’t know. He went abroad fifteen years ago. He must be dead I think, because if he were alive, he would certainly have written to us. He was very fond of Joyce and me; but no letter from him has reached us for years. He was charming. I wish you could have known him.”

“So do I—if you wish it. But——” coming over and sitting down beside her, “Don’t you think it is a little absurd, Barbara, after all these years, to think it necessary to tell me that you have good blood in your veins? Is it not a self-evident fact; and—one more word dearest—surely you might do me the credit to understand that I could never have fallen in love with anyone who hadn’t an ancestor or two.”

“And yet your father——”

“I know,” rising to his feet, his brow darkening. “Do you think I don’t suffer doubly on your account? That I don’t feel the insolence of his behaviour toward you *fourfold*? There is but one excuse for him and my mother, and that lies in their terrible disappointment about my brother—their eldest son.”

“I know; you have told me,” begins she quickly, but he interrupts her.

“Yes, I have been more open with you, than you with me. *I* feel no pride where you are concerned. Of course my brother’s conduct towards them is no excuse for their conduct towards you, but when one has a sore heart one is apt to be unjust, and many other things. You know what a heart-break he has been to the old people, *and is!* A gambler, a dishonourable gambler!” He turns away from her, and his nostrils dilate a little; his right hand grows clenched. “Every spare penny they possess

has been paid over to him or his creditors, and they are not overburdened with riches. They had set their hearts on him, and all their hopes, and when he failed them they fell back on me. The name is an old one; money was wanted. They had arranged a marriage for me, that would have been worldly wise. I *too* disappointed them !”

“ Oh !” she has sprung to her feet, and is staring at him with horrified eyes. “ A marriage ! There was someone else ! You accuse me of want of candour, and now, you—did you ever mention this before ?”

“ Now, Barbara, don't be the baby your name implies,” says he, placing her firmly back in her seat. “ I *didn't* marry that heiress, you know, which is proof positive that I loved you, not her.”

“ But she—she—” she stammers and ceases suddenly looking at him with a glance full of question. Womanlike, everything has given way to the awful thought, that this

unknown had not been unknown to him, and that perhaps he had admired—loved——

“Couldn’t hold a candle to you,” says he, laughing in spite of himself at her expression which indeed, is nearly tragic. “You needn’t suffocate yourself with charcoal because of her. She had made her pile, or rather her father had, at Birmingham or elsewhere, I never took the trouble to inquire, and she was undoubtedly solid in *every way*, but I don’t care for the female giant, and so I—you know the rest, I met *you* ; I tell you this only to soften your heart if possible, towards these lonely, embittered old people of mine.”

“Do you mean, that when your brother disappointed them, that they——” she pauses.

“No. They couldn’t make me their heir. The property is strictly entailed (what is left of it) ; you need not make yourself miserable imagining you have done me out of anything more than their goodwill. George will inherit whatever he has left them to leave.”

"It is sad," says she, with downcast eyes.

"Yes. He has been a constant source of annoyance to them ever since he left Eton."

"Where is he now?"

"Abroad, I believe. In Italy, somewhere, or France—not far from a gaming table, you may be sure. But I know nothing very exactly, as he does not correspond with me, and that letter of this morning is the first I have received from my father for four years."

"He must, indeed, hate me," says she, in a low tone. "His elder son such a failure, and you—he considers you a failure, too."

"Well, *I* don't consider myself so," says he, gaily.

"They were in want of money, and you—you married a girl without a penny."

"I married a girl who was in herself a mine of gold," returns he, laying his hands on her shoulders and giving her a little shake. "Come, never mind that letter,

darling ; what does it matter, when all is said and done ? ”

“ The first after all these years ; and the *last*—you remember it ? It was terrible. Am I unreasonable if I remember it ? ”

“ It was a cruel letter,” says he slowly ; “ to forget it would be impossible, either for you or me. But, as I said just now, how does it affect us ? You have me, and I have you ; and they, those foolish old people, they have——” He pauses abruptly, and then goes on in a changed tone, “ their memories.”

“ Oh ! and sad ones ! ” cries she, sharply, as if hurt. “ It is a terrible picture you have conjured up. You and I so happy, and they—Oh ! *poor* old people ! ”

“ They have wronged you—slighted you—ill-treated you,” says he, looking at her.

“ But they are unhappy ; they must be wretched always, about your brother, their *first* child. Oh ! what a grief is theirs ! ”

“ What a heart is *yours* ! ” says he, draw-

ing her to him. "Barbara ! surely I shall not die until they have met you, and learned why I love you."

CHAPTER III.

“ It was a lover and his lass

With a hey and a ho, and a hey-nonino !

That o’er the green cornfield did pass

In the Spring-time, the only pretty ring-time,

When birds do sing hey-ding-a-ding,

Sweet lovers love the Spring.”

JOYCE is running through the garden, all the sweet wild winds of heaven playing round her. They are a little wild still. It is the end of lovely May, but though languid summer is almost with us, a suspicion of her more sparkling sister Spring fills all the air.

Miss Kavanagh has caught up the tail of her gown, and is flying as if for dear life. Behind her come the foe, fast and furious. Tommy, indeed, is now dangerously close at her heels, armed with a ferocious-looking garden fork, his face crimson, his eyes glowing with the ardour of the chase ; Mabel,

much in the background, is making a bad third.

Miss Kavanagh is growing distinctly out of breath. In another moment Tommy will have her. By this time he has fully worked himself into the belief that he is a Red Indian, and she his lawful prey, and is prepared to make a tomahawk of his fork, and having felled her, to scalp her *somehow*, when Providence shows her a corner round a rhododendron bush that may save her for the moment. She makes for it, gains it, turns it, dashes round it, and *all but* precipitates herself into the arms of a young man who has been walking leisurely towards her.

He is a tall young man, not strictly handsome, but decidedly good to look at, with honest hazel eyes, and a shapely head, and altogether very well set up. As a rule he is one of the most cheerful people alive, and a tremendous favourite in his regiment, the — Hussars, though just now it might sug-

gest itself to the intelligent observer that he considers he has been hardly used. A very little more haste, and that precipitation *must* have taken place. He had made an instinctive movement towards her with protective arms outstretched ; but though a little cry had escaped her, she had maintained her balance, and now stands looking at him with laughing eyes, and panting breath, and two pretty hands pressed against her bosom.

Mr. Dysart lets his disappointed arms fall to his sides, and assumes the aggrieved air of one who has been done out of a good thing.

“ You ! ” says she, when at last she can speak.

“ I suppose so,” returns he, discontentedly. He might just as well have been anyone else, or anywhere else—such a chance—and *gone* !

“ Never were you so welcome ! ” cries she, dodging behind him as Tommy, fully armed, and all alive, comes tearing round the corner.

“ Ah, ha, Tommy, *sold* ! I’ve got a champion

now. I'm no longer shivering in my shoes. Mr. Dysart will protect me—*won't* you, Mr. Dysart?" to the young man, who says "yes" without stirring a muscle. The heaviest bribe would not have induced him to move, because, standing behind him, she has laid her dainty fingers on his shoulders, from which safe position she mocks at Tommy with security. Were the owner of the shoulders to stir, the owner of the fingers might remove those delightful members. Need it be said that, with this awful possibility before him, Mr. Dysart is prepared to die at his post rather than budge an inch.

And, indeed, death seems imminent. Tommy charging round the rhododendron, and finding himself robbed of his expected scalp, grows frantic, and makes desperate passes at Mr. Dysart's legs, which that hero, being determined as I have said not to stir under any provocation, circumvents with a considerable display of policy, such as :

"I say, Tommy, old boy, is that you?"

How d'ye do? Glad to see me, aren't you?" This last very artfully, with a view to softening the attacks. "You don't know what I've brought you!" This is more artful still, and distinctly a swindle, as he has brought him nothing, but on the spot he determines to redeem himself with the help of the small toy-shops and sweetie shops down in the village. "Put down that fork like a good boy, and let me tell you how——"

"Oh, *bother* you!" says Tommy, indignantly. "I'd have had her only for you! What brought you here *now*? Couldn't you have waited a bit?"

"Yes! what brought you?" says Miss Kavanagh, most disgracefully going over to the other side, now that danger is at an end, and Tommy has planted his impromptu tomahawk in a bed close by.

"Do you want to know?" says he, quickly.

The fingers have been removed from his shoulders, and he is now at liberty to turn

round and look at the charming face beside him.

"No, no !" says she, shaking her head. "I've been rude, I suppose. But it is such a wonderful thing to see you here so soon again."

"Why should I not be here ?"

"Of course ! That is the one unanswerable question. But you must confess it is puzzling to those who thought of you as being elsewhere."

"If you are one of 'those' you fill me with gratitude. That you should think of me even for a moment——"

"Well, I haven't been thinking much," says she, frankly, and with the most delightful if scarcely satisfactory little smile ; "I don't believe I was thinking of you at all, until I turned the corner just now, and then, I confess, I was startled, because I believed you to be at the Antipodes."

"Perhaps your belief was mother to your thought."

"Oh, no. Don't make me out so nasty. Well, but *were* you there?"

"Perhaps so. Where are they?" asks he gloomily. "One hears a good deal about them, but they comprise so many places that nowadays one is hardly sure where they exactly lie. At all events, no one has made them clear to me."

"Does it rest with me to enlighten you?" asks she, with a little aggravating half glance from under her long lashes. "Well—the North Pole, Kamtschatka, Smyrna, Timbuctoo, Maoriland, Margate——"

"We'll stop there I think," says he, with a faint grimace.

"There! At Margate? No, thanks. *You* can, if you like but as for me——"

"I don't suppose you would stop anywhere with me," says he. "I have occasional glimmerings that I hope mean common sense. No, I have not been so adventurous as to wander towards Margate. I have only been to town and back again."

"What town?"

"Eh? What town?" says he, astonished.

"*London*, you know."

"No, I don't know," says Miss Kavanagh, a little petulantly. "One would think there was only one town in the world, and that all you English people had the monopoly of it. There are other towns, I suppose. Even we poor Irish insignificants have a town or two. Dublin comes under that head, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. Of *course*," making great haste to abase himself. "It is mere snobbery our making so much of London. A kind of despicable cant, you know."

"Well, after all, I expect it is a big place in every way," says Miss Kavanagh, so far mollified by his submission as to be able to allow him something.

"It's a desert," says Tommy, turning to his aunt, with all the air of one who is about to impart to her useful information. "It's raging with wild beasts. They roam

to and fro and are at their wits' end——” here Tommy, who is great on Bible history, but who occasionally gets mixed, stops short. “Father says they’re there,” he winds up defiantly.

“Wild beasts !” echoes Mr. Dysart, bewildered. “Is *this* the teaching about their Saxon neighbours that the Irish children receive at the hands of their parents and guardians. Oh, well, come now, Tommy, really, you know——”

“Yes ; they are there,” says Tommy, rebelliously. “*Frightful* beasts ! *Bears* ! They’d tear you in bits if they could get at you. They have no reason in them, father says. And they climb up posts, and roar at people.”

“Oh, nonsense !” says Mr. Dysart. “One would think we were having a French Revolution all over again in England. Don’t you think,” glancing rather severely at Joyce, who is giving way to unrestrained mirth, “that it is not only wrong, but dangerous,

to implant such ideas about the English in the breasts of Irish children? There isn't a word of truth in it, Tommy."

"There *is*!" says Monkton, junior, wagging his head indignantly. "Father *told* me."

"Father told us," repeats the small Mabel, who has just come up.

"And father says, too, that the reason they are so wicked is because they want their freedom?" says Tommy, as though this is an unanswerable argument.

"Oh, I see! The Socialists!" says Mr. Dysart. "Yes; a troublesome pack! But still, to call them wild beasts——"

"They *are* wild beasts," says Tommy, prepared to defend his position to the last. "They've got *manes*, and *horns*, and *tails*!"

"He's romancing," says Mr. Dysart, looking at Joyce.

"He's not," says she demurely. "He is only trying to describe to you the Zoological Gardens. His father gives him a

graphic description of them every evening, and—the result you see.”

Here both she and he, after a glance at each other, burst out laughing,

“No wonder you were amused,” says he, “but you might have given me a hint. You were unkind to me—as usual.”

“Now that you have been to London,” says she, a little hurriedly, as if to cover his last words and pretend she hasn’t heard them, “you will find our poor Ireland duller than ever. At Christmas it is not so bad, but just *now*, and in the height of your season, too——”

“Do you call this place dull?” interrupts he. “Then let me tell you you misjudge your native land; this little bit of it, at all events. I think it not only the loveliest, but the liveliest place on earth.”

“You are easily pleased,” says she, with a rather embarrassed smile.

“He isn’t!” says Tommy, breaking into the conversation with great aplomb. He

has been holding on vigorously to Mr. Dysart's right hand for the last five minutes, after a brief but brilliant skirmish with Mabel as to the possession of it—a skirmish brought to a bloodless conclusion by the surrender, on Mr. Dysart's part, of his left hand to the weaker belligerent. "He hates Miss Maliphan, nurse says, though Lady Baltimore wants him to marry her, and she's a fine girl, nurse says, an' raal smart, and with the gift o' the gab, an' lots o' tin——"

"*Tommy!*" says his aunt frantically. It is indeed plain to everybody that Tommy is now quoting nurse, *au naturel*, and that he is betraying confidences in a perfectly reckless manner.

"Don't stop him," says Mr. Dysart, glancing at Joyce's crimson cheeks with something of disfavour. "'What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?' I *defy* you," a little stormily, "to think I care a farthing for Miss Maliphan or for any other woman on earth—*save one!*"

"Oh, you mustn't press your confidences on me," says she, smiling and dissembling rather finely; "I know nothing. I accuse you of nothing. Only, Tommy, you were a little rude, weren't you?"

"I wasn't," says Tommy promptly, in whom the inborn instinct of self-defence has been largely developed. "It's true. Nurse says she has a voice like a cow. Is *that* true?" turning, unabashed, to Dysart.

"She's expected at the Court next week. You shall come up and judge for yourself," says he laughing. "And," turning to Joyce, "you will come too, I hope."

"It is manners to wait to be asked," returns she smiling.

"Oh, as for that," says he, "Lady Baltimore crossed last night with me and her husband. And here is a letter for you." He pulls a note of the cocked hat order out of one of his pockets.

CHAPTER IV.

“Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?
Reply, reply.”

“AN invitation from Lady Baltimore,” says Joyce, looking at the big red crest, and colouring slightly.

“Yes.”

“How do you know?” asks she, rather suspiciously.

The young man raises his hands and eyes.

“I *swear* I had nothing to do with it,” says he; “I didn’t so much as hint at it. Lady Baltimore spent her time crossing the Channel in declaring to all who were well enough to hear her, that she lived only in the expectation of soon seeing you again.”

“Nonsense!” scornfully; “it is only a

month ago since I was staying there, just before they went to London. By the bye, what brings them home now? In the very beginning of their season?"

"I don't know. And it is as well not to enquire perhaps. Baltimore and my cousin, as all the world knows, have not hit it off together. Yet when Isabel married him, we all thought it was quite an ideal marriage, they were so much in love with each other."

"Hot love soon cools," says Miss Kavanagh in a general sort of way.

"I don't believe it," sturdily, "if it's the right sort of love. However, to go back to your letter—which you haven't even deigned to open—you *will* accept the invitation, won't you?"

"I don't know," hesitating.

"Oh! I say, *do* come! It is only for a week, and even if it does bore you, still, as a Christian you ought to consider how much, even in that short time, you will be

able to add to the happiness of your fellow creatures."

"Flattery means insincerity," says she, tilting her chin, "keep all that sort of thing for your Miss Maliphant; it is thrown away upon me."

"*My* Miss Maliphant! Really I must protest against your accrediting me with such a possession. But look here, *don't* disappoint us all; and you won't be dull either, there are lots of people coming. Dicky Browne for one."

"Oh! will he be there?" brightening visibly.

"Yes," rather gloomily, and perhaps a little sorry that he has said anything about Mr. Browne's possible arrival—though to feel jealousy about that social butterfly is indeed to sound the depths of folly; "you like him?"

"I *love* him," says Miss Kavanagh promptly and with sufficient enthusiasm to restore hope in the bosom of any man except a lover.

"He is blessed indeed," says he stiffly. "Beyond his deserts I cannot help thinking. I really think he is the biggest fool I ever met."

"Oh ! not the biggest, surely," says she, so saucily, and with such a reprehensible tendency towards laughter, that he gives way and laughs too, though unwillingly.

"True. I'm a bigger," says he, "but as that is *your* fault, you should be the last to taunt me with it."

"Foolish people always talk folly," says she with an assumption of indifference that does not hide her red cheeks. "Well, go on, who is to be at the Court besides Dicky?"

"Lady Swansdown."

"I like her too."

"But not so well as you like Dicky, you *love* him according to your own statement."

"Don't be matter-of-fact !" says Miss Kavanagh, giving him a well-deserved snub. "Do you always say exactly what you mean ?"

“ Always—to *you*.”

“ I daresay you would be more interesting if you didn't,” says she, with a little, lovely smile, that quite spoils the harshness of her words. Of her few faults, perhaps the greatest is that she seldom knows her own mind, where her lovers are concerned, and will blow hot and cold, and merry and sad, and cheerful and petulant, all in one breath as it were. Poor lovers ! they have a hard time of it with her as a rule. But youth is often so, and the cold still years, as they creep on us, with dull common sense and deadly reason in their train, cure us all too soon of our pretty idle follies.

Just now she was bent on rebuffing him, but you see her strength failed her, and she spoiled her effect by the smile she mingled with the rebuff. The smile indeed was so charming, that he remembers nothing but it, and so she not only gains nothing, but loses something to the other side.

“ Well, I'll try to mend all that,” says he,

but so lovingly, and with such unaffected tenderness that she quails beneath his glance. Coquette as undoubtedly Nature has made her, she has still so gentle a soul within her bosom that she shrinks from inflicting *actual* pain. A pang or two, a passing regret to be forgotten the next hour—or at all events in the next change of scene—she is not above imparting, but when people grow earnest like—like Mr. Dysart for example—they grow troublesome. And she hasn't made up her mind to marry, and there are other people——

“The Clontarfs are to be there too,” goes on Dysart, who is a cousin of Lady Baltimore's, and knows all about her arrangements; “and the Brownings, and Norman Beauclerk.”

“The—Clontarfs,” says Joyce, in a hurried way, that might almost be called confused; to the man who loves her, and who is watching her, it is quite plain that she is not thinking of Lord and Lady Clontarf, who

are quite an ordinary couple and devoted to each other, but of that last name spoken—Norman Beauclerk ; Lady Baltimore's brother, a man, handsome, agreeable, aristocratic—the man whose attentions to her a month ago, had made a little topic for conversation amongst the country people. Dull country people, who never go anywhere or see anything beyond their stupid selves, and who are therefore driven to do something or other to avoid suicide or the murdering of each other ; gossip unlimited, is their safety valve.

“ Yes, and Beauclerk,” persists Dysart, a touch of despair at his heart ; “ you and he were good friends when last he was over, eh ? ”

“ I am generally very good friends with everybody ; not an altogether desirable character, not a strong one,” says she smiling, and still openly parrying the question.

“ You liked Beauclerk,” says he, a little doggedly perhaps.

“Ye—es—very well.”

“Very *much* ! Why can’t you be *honest* !” says he flashing out at her.

“I don’t know what you mean,” coldly. “If, however, you persist on my looking into it, I—” defiantly—“yes, I *do* like Mr. Beauclerk very much.”

“Well, I don’t know what you see in that fellow.”

“Nothing,” airily, having now recovered herself, “that’s his charm.”

“If,” gravely, “you gave that as your opinion of Dicky Browne I could believe you.”

She laughs.

“Poor Dicky,” says she, “what a cruel judgment ; and yet you are right ;” she has changed her whole manner and is now evidently bent on restoring him to good humour, and compelling him to forget all about Mr. Beauclerk. “I must give in to you about Dicky. There isn’t even the vaguest suggestion of meaning about *him*.

I—" with a deliberate friendly glance flung straight into his eyes—"don't often give in to you, do I?"

On this occasion, however, her coquetry—so generally successful—is completely thrown away. Dysart with his dark eyes fixed uncompromisingly upon hers, makes the next move—an antagonistic one.

"You have a very high opinion of Beauclerk," says he.

"Have I?" laughing uneasily, and refusing to let her rising temper give way. "We all have our opinions, on every subject that comes under our notice. You have one on this subject evidently."

"Yes, but it is not a high one," says he unpleasantly.

"After all, what does that matter? I don't pretend to understand you, I will only suggest to you that our opinions are but weak things—mere prejudices—no more."

"I am not prejudiced against Beauclerk if you mean that," a little hotly.

"I didn't," with a light shrug. "Believe me, you think a great deal more about him than I do."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am at all events sure of one thing," says she quickly, darting at him a frowning glance, "that you have no right to ask me that question."

"I have not indeed," acknowledges he stiffly still, but with so open an apology in his whole air that she forgives him. "Many conflicting thoughts led me astray. I must ask your pardon."

"Why, granted!" says she. "And—I was cross, wasn't I? After all an old friend like you might be allowed a little laxity. There, never mind," holding out her hand. "Let us make it up."

Dysart grasps the little extended hand with avidity, and peace seems restored when Tommy puts an end to all things. To anyone acquainted with children I need hardly remark that he has been listening to the

foregoing conversation with all his ears and all his eyes and every bit of his puzzled intelligence.

"Well, go on," says he, giving his aunt a push when the friendly hand-shake has come to an end.

"Go on? Where?" asks she, with apparent unconcern but a deadly foreboding at her breast. She knows her Tommy.

"You *said* you were going to make it up with him!" says that hero, regarding her with disapproving eyes.

"Well, I have made it up."

"No you haven't! when you make it up with me you always kiss me! Why don't you kiss him?"

Consternation on the part of the principal actors. Dysart, strange to say, is the first to recover.

"Why, indeed?" says he, giving way all at once to a fatal desire for laughter. This, Miss Kavanagh, being vexed with herself for her late confusion, resents strongly.

"I am sure, Tommy," says she, with a mildness that would not have imposed upon an infant, "that your lesson hour has arrived. Come, say good-bye to Mr. Dysart, and let us begin at once. You know I am going to teach you to-day. Good-bye, Mr. Dysart—if you want to see Barbara, you will find her very probably in the study."

"Don't go like this," says he anxiously. "Or if you *will* go at least tell me that you will accept Lady Baltimore's invitation."

"I don't know," smiling coldly. "I think not. You see I was there for such a *long* time in the beginning of the year, and Barbara always wants me, and one should not be selfish, you know."

"One should not, indeed!" says he, with slow meaning. "What answer then, must I give my cousin? You know," in a low tone, "that she is not altogether happy. You can lighten her burden a little. She is fond of you."

"I can lighten Barbara's burden also.

Think me the very incarnation of selfishness if you will," says she rather unjustly, "but still, if Barbara says 'don't go,' I shall stay here."

"Mrs. Monkton won't say that."

"Perhaps not," toying idly with a rose, in such a careless fashion as drives him to despair. Brushing it to and fro across her lips she seems to have lost all interest in the question in hand.

"If she says to you 'go,' how then?"

"Why then—I may still remain here."

"Well stay then, of course, if you so desire it!" cries he angrily. "If to make all your world *unhappy*, is to make you happy, why be so by all means."

"*All* my world! Do you suppose then that it will make Barbara and Freddy unhappy to have my company? What a gallant speech!" says she, with a provoking little laugh and a swift lifting of her eyes to his.

"No, but it will make other people (more

than *twice* two) miserable to be deprived of if?"

"Are you one of that quartette?" asks she, so saucily, yet withal so merrily that the hardest-hearted lover might forgive her. A little irresistible laugh breaks from her lips. Rather ruefully he joins in it.

"I don't think I need answer that question," says he. "To you at all events."

"To me of all people rather," says she still laughing, "seeing I am the interested party."

"No, that character belongs to me. You have no interest in it. To me it is life or death—to you——"

"No, no, you mustn't talk to me like that. You know I forbid you last time we met, and you promised me to be good."

"I promised then the most difficult thing in the world. But never mind me; the principal thing is, your acceptance or rejection of that note. Joyce!" in a low tone. "*Say* you will accept it."

"Well," relenting visibly, and now refusing to meet his eyes. "I'll ask Barbara, and if she says I may go I——" pause.

"You will then accept?" eagerly.

"I shall then—think about it."

"You look like an angel," says he, "and you have the heart of a flint."

This remark, that might have presumably annoyed another girl, seems to fill Miss Kavanagh with mirth.

"Am I so bad as that?" cries she gaily. "Why, I shall make amends then. I shall change my evil ways. As a beginning, see here. If Barbara says go to the Court, go I will. Now, stern moralist! where are you?"

"In the seventh heaven," says he promptly. "Be it a Fool's Paradise or otherwise, I shall take up my abode there for the present. And now you will go and ask Mrs. Monkton?"

"In what a hurry to get rid of me!" says this coquette of all coquettes. "Well, good-bye then——"

“Oh no, don't go.”

“To the Court? Was ever man so unreasonable? In one breath ‘do,’ and ‘don’t’!”

“Was ever woman so tormenting?”

“Tormenting? No, so discerning if you will, or else so——”

“Adorable! You can't find fault with *that* at all events.”

“And therefore my mission is at an end! Good-bye again.”

“Good-bye.” He is holding her hand as though he never means to let her have it again. “That rose,” says he pointing to the flower that has kissed her lips so often. “It is nothing to you, you can pick yourself another, give it to me.”

“I can pick you another too, a nice fresh one,” says she. “Here,” moving towards a glowing bush; “here is a bud worth having.”

“Not that one,” hastily. “Not one this garden, or any other garden holds, save the

one in your hand. It is the only one in the world of roses worth having."

"I hate to give a faded gift," says she, looking at the rose she holds with apparent disfavour.

"Then I shall take it," returns he with decision. He opens her pretty pink palm, releases the dying rosebud from it and places it triumphantly in his coat.

"You haven't got any manners," says she, but she laughs again as she says it.

"Except bad ones you should add."

"Yes, I forgot that. A point lost. Good-bye now, good-bye indeed."

She waves her hand lightly to him and calling to the children runs towards the house. It seems as if she has carried all the beauty and brightness and sweetness of the day with her.

As Dysart turns back again, the afternoon appears grey and gloomy.

CHAPTER V.

“Look ere thou leap, see ere thou go.”

“WELL, Barbara, can I go?”

“I don’t know”—doubtfully. There is a cloud on Mrs. Monkton’s brow, she is staring out of the window instead of into her sister’s face, and is evidently a little distressed or uncertain. “You have been there so lately, and——”

“You want to say something,” says the younger sister, seating herself on the sofa, and drawing Mrs. Monkton down beside her. “Why don’t you do it?”

“You can’t want to go so very much, can you now?” asks the latter anxiously, almost entreatingly.

“I is I who don’t know this time!” says Joyce, with a smile. “And yet——”

"It seems only like yesterday that you came back after spending a month there."

"A yesterday that dates from six weeks ago," a little reproachfully.

"I know. You like being there. It is a very amusing house to be at. I don't blame you in any way. Lord and Lady Baltimore are both charming in their own ways, and very kind, and yet——"

"There, don't stop ; you are coming to it now, the very heart of the meaning. Go on," authoritatively, and seizing her sister in her arms, "or I'll *shake* it out of you."

"It is this then," says Mrs. Monkton slowly. "I don't think it is a *wise* thing for you to go there so often."

"Oh Barbara ! Owl of Wisdom as thou art, why not ?" The girl is laughing, yet a deep flush of colour has crept into each cheek.

"Never mind the why not. Perhaps it is unwise to go *anywhere* too often ; and

you must acknowledge that you spent almost the entire spring there."

"Well, I hinted all that to Mr. Dysart."

"Was he here?"

"Yes. He came down from the Court with the note."

"And—who else is to be there?"

"Oh! the Clontarfs, and Dicky Browne, and Lady Swansdown and a great many others."

"Mr. Beauclerk?" she does not look at Joyce as she asks this question.

"Yes."

A little silence follows, broken at last by Joyce.

"*May* I go?"

"Do you think it is the best thing for you to do?" says Mrs. Monkton flushing delicately. "*Think*, darling! You know—you *must* know, because you have it always before you," flushing even deeper, "that to marry into a family where you are not welcomed with open heart, is to know much private discomfiture."

"I know this too," says the girl petulantly, "that to be married to a man like Freddy, who consults your lightest wish, and is your lover always, is worth the enduring of anything."

"I think that too," says Mrs. Monkton, who has now grown rather pale. "But there is still one more thing to know—that in making such a marriage as we have described, a woman lays out a thorny path for her husband. She separates him from his family, and as all good men have strong home ties, she naturally compels him to feel many a secret pang."

"But he has his compensations. Do you think if Freddy got the chance, he would give you up and go back to his family?"

"No—not that. But to rejoice in that thought is to be selfish. Why should he not have my love and the love of his people too? There is a want somewhere. What I wish to impress upon you, Joyce, is this, that a woman who marries a man against

his parents' wishes has much to regret, much to endure."

"I think you are ungrateful," says the girl a little vehemently. "Freddy has made you endure nothing. You are the happiest married woman I know."

"Yes, but I have made *him* endure a great deal," says Mrs. Monkton in a low tone. She rises, and going to the window, stands there looking out upon the sunny landscape, but seeing nothing.

"Barbara ! you are crying," says Joyce, going up to her abruptly and folding her arms round her.

"It is nothing, dear. Nothing at all, darling. Only—I wish he and his father were friends again. Freddy is too good a man not to regret the estrangement."

"I believe you think Freddy is a little god !" says Joyce laughing.

"Oh ! not a *little* one," says Mrs. Monkton, and as Freddy stands six foot one in his socks, they both laugh at this.

“Still you don’t answer me,” says the girl presently, “you don’t say ‘you may’ or ‘you shan’t’—which is it to be, Barbara?”

Her tone is distinctly coaxing now, and as she speaks she gives her sister a little squeeze that is plainly meant to press the desired permission out of her.

Still Mrs. Monkton hesitates.

“You see,” says she temporizing, “there are so many reasons. The Court,” pausing and flushing, “is not *quite* the house for so young a girl as you.”

“Oh Barbara!”

“You can’t misunderstand me,” says her sister with agitation. “You know how I like, I *love* Lady Baltimore, and how good Lord Baltimore has been to Freddy. When his father cast him off there was very little left to us for beginning housekeeping with, and when Lord Baltimore gave him his agency—Oh, *well*! it isn’t likely we shall either of us forget to be grateful for *that*.

If it was only for ourselves I should say nothing, but it is for you, dear ; and—this unfortunate affair—this determined hostility that exists between Lord and Lady Baltimore, makes it unpleasant for the guests. You know,” nervously, “I hate gossip of any sort, but one must defend one’s own.”

“But there is nothing unpleasant ; one sees nothing. They are charming to each other. I have been staying there and I know.”

“Have I not stayed there too ? It is impossible, Joyce, to fight against facts. All the world knows they are not on good terms.”

“Well, a great many other people aren’t perhaps.”

“When they aren’t the tone of the house gets lowered. And I have noticed of late that they have people there who——”

“Who what, Barbara ?”

“Oh yes, I *know* they are all right ; they are received everywhere, but are they good

companions for a girl of your years? It is not a healthy atmosphere for you. They are rich people who think less of a hundred guineas than you do of five. Is it wise I ask you again to accustom yourself to their ways."

"Nonsense, Barbara!" says her sister, looking at her with a growing surprise. "That is not like you. Why should we despise the rich, why should we seek to emulate them? Surely both you and I have too good blood in our veins to give way to such follies." She leans towards Mrs. Monkton, and with a swift gesture, gentle as firm, turns her face to her own.

"Now for the real reason," says she.

Unthinkingly she has brought confusion on herself. Barbara, as though stung to cruel candour, gives her the real reason in a sentence.

"Tell me this," says she, "which do you like best, Mr. Dysart, or Mr. Beauclerk?"

Joyce, taking her arm from round her

sister's neck, moves back from her. A deep colour has flamed into her cheeks, then died away again. She looks quite calm now.

"What a question," says she.

"Well," feverishly, "answer it."

"Oh, no," says the girl quickly.

"Why not? Why not answer it to me, your chief friend? You think the question indelicate, but why should I shrink from asking a question on which, perhaps, the happiness of your whole life depends? If—if you have set your heart on Mr. Beauclerk——" She stops, checked by something in Miss Kavanagh's face.

"Well, what then?" asks the latter coldly.

"It will bring you unhappiness. He is Lady Baltimore's brother. She already plans for him. The Beauclerks are poor—he is bound to marry money."

"That is a good deal about Mr. Beauclerk, but what about the other possible suitor whom you suppose I am madly in love with?"

“Don’t talk to me like that, Joyce. Do you think I have anything at heart except your interests? As to Mr. Dysart, if you like *him*, I confess I should be glad of it. He is only a cousin of the Baltimores, and of such moderate means that they would scarcely object to his marrying a penniless girl.”

“You rate me highly,” says Joyce, with a sudden rather sharp little laugh. “I am good enough for the cousin—I am *not* good enough for the brother, who may reasonably look higher.”

“Not higher,” haughtily. “He can only marry a girl of good birth. *You* are that, but he, in his position, will look for money, or else his people will look for it for him. Whereas, Mr. Dysart——”

“Yes, you needn’t go over it all again. Mr. Dysart is about on a level with me, he will *never* have any money, neither shall I.” Suddenly she looks round at her sister, her eyes very bright. “Tell me then,” says she,

"what does it all come to? That I am bound to refuse to marry a man, because he has money, and because I have none."

"That is not the argument," says Barbara anxiously.

"I think it is."

"It is not. I advise you strongly not to think of Mr. Beauclerk, yet *he* has no money to speak of."

"He has more than Freddy."

"But he is a different man from Freddy—with different tastes, different aspirations, different—— He's different," emphatically, "in *every* way!"

"To be different from the person one loves is not to be a bad man," says Joyce slowly, her eyes on the ground.

"My dear girl, who has called Mr. Beauclerk a bad man?"

"You don't like him," says Miss Kavanagh, still more slowly, still with thoughtful eyes downcast.

"I like Mr. Dysart better if you mean that."

"No, I don't mean that. And, besides, that is no answer."

"Was there a question?"

"Yes. Why don't you like Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Have I said I didn't like him?"

"Not in so many words, but——. Well, why don't you?"

"I don't know," rather lamely.

Miss Kavanagh laughs a little satirically, and Mrs. Monkton, objecting to mirth of that description, takes fire.

"Why do you *like* him?" asks she defiantly.

"I don't know either," returns Joyce, with a rueful smile. "And after all I'm not sure that I like him so *very* much. You evidently imagine me to be head over ears in love with him, yet I, myself, scarcely know whether I like him or not."

"You always look at him so kindly, and you always pull your skirts aside to give him a place by your side."

"I should do that for Tommy."

"Would you? That would be *too* kind," says Tommy's mother, laughing. "It would mean ruin to your skirts in two minutes."

"But, consider the gain. The priceless scraps of wisdom I should hear, even whilst my clothes were being demolished."

This has been a mere interlude, unintentional on the part of either, and, once over, neither knows how to go on. The question *must* be settled one way or the other.

"There is one thing," says Mrs. Monkton, at length. "You certainly prefer Mr. Beauclerk to Mr. Dysart."

"Do I? I wish I knew as much about myself as you know about me. And, after all, it is of no consequence whom I like. The real thing is—— Come, Barbara, you who know so much can tell me this——"

"Well?" says Mrs. Monkton, seeing she has grown very red, and is evidently hesitating.

"No. This absurd conversation has gone

far enough. I was going to ask you to solve a riddle, but——”

“But what?”

“You are too serious about it.”

“Not *too* serious. It is very important.”

“Oh, Barbara, do you *know* what you are saying?” cries the girl with an angry little stamp, turning to her a face pale and indignant. “You have been telling me in so many words that I am in love with either Mr. Beauclerk or Mr. Dysart. Pray now, for a change, tell me which of them is in love with *me*.”

“Mr. Dysart,” says Barbara quietly.

Her sister laughs angrily.

“You think everybody who looks at me is in love with me.”

“Not *everyone*!”

“Meaning Mr. Beauclerk.”

“No,” slowly. “I think he likes you, too, but he is a man who will always *think*. You know he has come in for that property in Hampshire through his uncle’s death, but

he got no money with it. It is a large place, impossible to keep up without a large income, and his uncle left every penny away from him. It is in great disrepair, the house especially. I hear it is falling to pieces. Mr. Beauclerk is an ambitious man, he will seek means to rebuild his house."

"Well, what of that? It is an interesting bit of history, but how does it concern me? Take that troubled look out of your eyes, Barbara. I assure you Mr. Beauclerk is as little to me as I am to him."

She speaks with such evident sincerity, with such an undeniable belief in the truth of her own words, that Mrs. Monkton, looking at her and reading her soul through her clear eyes, feels a weight lifted from her heart.

"That is all right then," says she simply. She turns as if to go away, but Miss Kavanagh has still a word or two to say.

"I may go to the Court?" says she.

"Yes; I suppose so."

"But you won't be vexed if I go, Barbie?"

“No ; not now.”

“Well,” slipping her arm through hers, with an audible sigh of delight. “*That’s* settled.”

“Things generally *do* get settled the way you want them to be,” says Mrs. Monkton, laughing. “Come, what about your frocks, eh ? ”

From this out they spend a most enjoyable hour or two.

CHAPTER VI.

“Or if they sing, ’tis with so dull a cheer,
That leaves look pale, thinking the winter’s near.”

THE visit to the Court being decided on, Miss Kavanagh undertakes life afresh, with a joyous heart. Lord and Lady Baltimore are the best host and hostess in the world and a visit to them means unmixed pleasure while it lasts. The Court is, indeed, the pleasantest house in the county, the most desirable in all respects, and the gayest. Yet, strange and sad to add, happiness has found no bed within its walls.

This is the more remarkable in that the marriage of Lord and Lady Baltimore had been an almost idealistic one. They had been very much in love with each other. All the hosts of friends and relations that belonged to either side had been delighted

with the engagement. So many imprudent marriages were made, so many disastrous ones ; but *here* was a marriage where birth and money went together, and left no guardians or parents lamenting. All Belgravia stood still and stared at the young couple with genuine admiration. It wasn't often that love, pure and simple, fell into their midst, and such a *satisfactory* love too ! None of your erratic darts that struck the wrong breasts, and created confusion for miles around, but a thoroughly proper, respectable winged arrow that pierced the bosoms of those who might safely be congratulated on the reception of it.

They had, indeed, been very much in love with each other. Few people have known such extreme happiness as fell to their lot for two whole years. They were wrapped up in each other, and when the little son came at the end of that time, *nothing* seemed wanted. They grew so strong in their belief in the immutability of their own relations, one to the

other, that when the blow fell that separated them, it proved a very lightning-stroke, dividing soul from body.

Lady Baltimore could be at no time called a beautiful woman. But there is always a charm in her face, a strength, an attractiveness that might well defy the more material charms of a lovelier than herself. With a soul as pure as her face, and a mind entirely innocent of the world's evil ways—and the sad and foolish secrets she is compelled to bear upon her tired bosom from century to century—she took with a bitter hardness the revelations of her husband's former life before he married her, related to her by—of course—a devoted friend.

Unfortunately the authority was an undeniable one. It was impossible for Lady Baltimore to refuse to believe. The past, too, she might have condoned ; though, believing in her husband as she did, it would always have been bitter to her, but the devoted friend—may all such meet their just reward !—had

not stopped there ; she had gone a step further, a fatal step ; she had told her something that had *not* occurred since their marriage.

Perhaps the devoted friend believed in her lie, perhaps she did not. Anyway, the mischief was done. Indeed, from the beginning seeds of distrust had been laid, and, buried in so young and unlearned a bosom, had taken a fatal grip.

The more fatal in that there was truth in them. As a fact, Lord Baltimore had been the hero of several ugly passages in his life. His early life, certainly ; but a young wife who has begun by thinking him immaculate, would hardly be the one to lay stress upon *that*. And when her friend, who had tried unsuccessfully to marry Lord Baltimore and had failed, had in the kindest spirit, *of course*, opened her eyes to his misdoings, she had at first passionately refused to listen, then *had* listened, and after that was ready to listen to anything.

One episode in his past history had been made much of. The sorry heroine of it had been an actress. This was bad enough, but when the disinterested friend went on to say that Lord Baltimore had been seen in her company only so long ago as last week, matters came to a climax. That was a long time ago from to-day, but the shock when it came shattered all the sacred feelings in Lady Baltimore's heart. She grew cold, callous, indifferent. Her mouth, a really beautiful feature, that used to be a picture of serenity and charity personified, hardened. She became austere, cold. Not difficult, so much as unsympathetic. She was still a good hostess, and those who had known her *before* her misfortune still loved her. But she made no new friends, and she sat down within herself, as it were, and gave herself up to her fate, and would probably have died or grown reckless but for her little son.

And it was *after* the birth of this beloved child that she had been told that *her* husband

had again been seen in company with Madame Istray ; *that* seemed to add fuel to the fire already kindled. She could not forgive that. It was proof positive of his baseness.

To the young wife it was all a revelation, a horrible one. She had been so stunned by it, that she accepted it as it stood, and learning that the stories of his life *before* marriage were true, had decided that the stories told of his life *after* marriage were true also. She was young, and youth is always hard.

To her no doubt remained of his infidelity. She had come of a brave old stock, who, if they could not fight, could at least endure in silence, and knew well the necessity of keeping her name out of the public mouth. She kept herself well in hand, therefore, and betrayed nothing of all she had been feeling. She dismissed her friend with a gentle air, dignified, yet of sufficient haughtiness to let that astute, and now decidedly repentant lady, know that never again would she enter the doors of the court, or any other of Lady Baltimore's

houses ; yet she restrained herself all through so well that even until the very end came, her own husband never knew how horribly she suffered through her disbelief in him.

He thought her heartless. There was no scandal, no public separation. She said a word or two to him that told him what she had heard, and when he tried to explain the truths of that last libel that had declared him unfaithful to her since her marriage, she had silenced him with so cold, so scornful, so contemptuous a glance and word, that, chilled and angered in his turn, he had left her.

Twice afterwards he had sought to explain matters, but it was useless. She would not listen ; the treacherous friend, whom she never betrayed, had done her work well. Lady Baltimore, though she never forgave *her*, would not forgive her husband either ; she would make no formal attempt at a separation. Before the world she and he lived together, seemingly on the best terms ; at all events on quite as good terms as most of their acquaint-

ances ; yet all the world knew how it was with them. So long as there are servants, so long will it be impossible to effectually conceal our most sacred secrets.

Her friends, when the Baltimores went to visit them, made arrangements to suit them. It was a pity, everybody said, that such complications should have arisen, and one would not have expected it from Isabel, but then she seemed so cold, that probably a climax like that did not affect her as much as it might another. She was so entirely wrapped up in her boy—some women were like that—a child sufficed them. And as for Lord Baltimore—Cyril—why—— Judgment was divided here ; the women taking his part, the men hers. The latter finding an attraction hardly to be defined, in her pure, calm, rather impenetrable face, that had yet a smile so lovely that it could warm the seemingly cold face into a something that was more effective than mere beauty. It was a wonderful smile, and, in spite of all her troubles, was by no means rare.

Lady Baltimore, they all acknowledged, was a delightful guest and hostess.

As for Lord Baltimore, he—well, he would know how to console himself. Society, the cruellest organization on earth, laughed to itself about him. He had known how to live before his marriage ; now that the marriage had proved a failure, he would still know how to make life bearable.

In this they wronged him.

CHAPTER VII.

“Ils n’employent les paroles que pour déguiser leurs pensées.”
—VOLTAIRE.

EVEN the most dyspeptic of the guests had acknowledged at breakfast, some hours ago now, that a lovelier day could hardly be imagined. Lady Baltimore, with a smile, had agreed with him. It was, indeed, impossible not to agree with him. The sun was shining high in the heavens, and a soft, velvety air blew through the open windows right on to the table.

“What shall we do to-day?” Lady Swansdown, one of the guests, had asked, addressing her question to Lord Baltimore, who just then was helping his little son to porridge.

Whatever she liked.

“Then *nothing!*” says she, in that soft

drawl of hers, and that little familiar imploring glance of hers at her hostess, who sat behind the urn, and glanced back at her ever so kindly.

“Yes, it was too warm to dream of exertion ; would Lady Swansdown like to remain at home then, and dream away the afternoon in a hammock ?”

“Dreams were delightful ; but to dream *alone*——”

“Oh, no ; they would all, or at least most of them, stay with her.” It was Lady Baltimore who had said this, after waiting in vain for her husband to speak—to whom, indeed, Lady Swansdown’s question had been rather pointedly addressed.

So at home they all had stayed. No one being very keen about doing anything on a day so sultry.

Yet now, when luncheon is at an end, and the day still heavy with heat, the desire for action that lies in every breast takes fire. They are all tired of doing nothing. The

tennis-courts lie invitingly empty, and rackets thrust themselves into notice at every turn ; as for the balls, worn out from *ennui*, they insert themselves under each arched instep, threatening to bring the owners to the ground, unless picked up and made use of.

“ Who wants a beating ? ” demands Mr. Browne at last, unable to pretend lassitude any longer. Taking up a racket, he brandishes it wildly, presumably to attract attention. This is necessary. As a rule, nobody pays any attention to Dicky Browne.

He is a nondescript sort of young man, of the negative order ; with no features to speak of, and a capital opinion of himself. Income vague. Age unknown.

“ Well, that’s *one* way of putting it,” says Miss Kavanagh, with a little tilt of her pretty chin.

“ Is it a riddle ? ” asks Dysart. “ If so I know it. The answer is—Dicky Browne.”

“ Oh, I like that ! ” says Mr. Browne, un

abashed. "See here, I'll give you plus fifteen, and a bisque, and start myself at minus thirty, and beat you in a canter."

"Dear Mr. Browne, consider the day ! I believe there are such things as sunstrokes," says Lady Swansdown in her sweet treble.

"There are. But Dicky's all right," says Lord Baltimore, drawing up a garden chair close to hers, and seating himself upon it. "His head is safe. The sun makes no impression upon granite !"

"Ah, *granite* ! that applies to a heart not a head," says Lady Swansdown, resting her blue eyes on Baltimore's for just a swift second.

It is wonderful however what her eyes can do in a second. Baltimore laughs lightly, returns her glance fourfold, and draws his chair a quarter of an inch closer to hers. To move it more than that, would have been an impossibility.

Lady Swansdown makes a slight movement. With a smile seraphic as an angel's, she pulls

her lace skirts a little to one side, as if to prove to Baltimore that he has encroached beyond his privileges upon her domain. "People should not *crush* people. And *why* do you want to get so very close to me?" This question lies within the serene eyes she once more raises to his.

She is a lovely woman, blonde, serene, dangerous! In each glance she turns upon the man who happens at any moment to be next to her, lies an entire chapter on the "Whole Art of Flirtation." Were she reduced to penury, and the world a little more advanced in its fashionable ways, she might readily make a small fortune in teaching young ladies "How to Marry Well." No man could resist her pupils, once properly finished by her and turned out to prey upon the stronger sex. "The Complete Angler" would be a title they might filch with perfect honour and call their own.

She is a tall beauty, with soft limbs, graceful as a panther, or a cat. Her eyes are like

the skies in summer time, her lips sweet and full. The silken hair that falls in soft masses on her Grecian brow, is light as corn in harvest, and she has hands and feet that are absolutely faultless. She has even more than all these—a most convenient husband, who is not only now but apparently always in a position of trust abroad. Very *much* abroad. The Fiji, or the Sandwich Islands for choice. One can't hear from those centres of worldly dissipation in a hurry. And after all, it really doesn't very much matter *where* he is !

There had been a whisper or two in the County about her and Lord Baltimore. Everybody knew the latter had been a little wild since his estrangement with his wife, but nothing to signify very much—nothing that one could lay one's finger on, until Lady Swansdown had come down last year to the Court. Whether Baltimore was in love with her was uncertain, but all were agreed that she was in love with him. Not that she made

an *esclandre* of any sort, but *one could see* ! And still ! she was such a friend of *Lady Baltimore's*—an old friend. They had been girls together—that was what was so wonderful ! And Lady Baltimore made very much of her, and treated her with the kindest observances, and——. But one had often heard of the serpent that one nourished in one's bosom only that it might come to life and sting one ! The County grew wise over this complication ; and perhaps when Mrs. Monkton had hinted to Joyce of the “odd people” the Baltimores asked to the Court, she had had Lady Swansdown in her mind.

“Whose heart ?” asks Baltimore, *àpropos* of her last remark. “Yours.”

It is a leading remark, and something in the way it is uttered strikes unpleasantly on the ears of Dysart. Baltimore is bending over his lovely guest, and looking at her with an admiration too open to be quite respectful. But she betrays no resentment. She smiles back at him indeed in that little

slow, seductive way of hers, and makes him an answer in a tone too low for even those nearest to her to hear. It is a sort of challenge, a tacit acknowledgment that they two are alone even in the midst of all these tiresome people.

Baltimore accepts it. Of late he has grown a little reckless. The battling against circumstances has been too much for him. He has gone under. The persistent coldness of his wife, her refusal to hear, or believe in him, has had its effect. A man of a naturally warm and kindly disposition, thrown thus back upon himself, he has now given a loose rein to the carelessness that has been a part of his nature since his mother gave him to the world, and allows himself to swim or go down with the tide that carries his present life upon its bosom.

Lady Swansdown is lovely ! and kind. Always with that sense of injury full upon him, that half-concealed but ever-present desire for revenge upon the wife who has so coldly

condemned and cast him aside, he flings himself willingly into a flirtation, ready made to his hand, and as dangerous as it seems light.

His life, he tells himself, is hopelessly embittered. The best things in it are denied him ; he gives therefore the more heed to the honeyed words of the pretty creature near him, who in truth likes him too well for her own soul's good.

That detested husband of hers, out there *somewhere*, the only thought she ever gives him is when she remembers with horror how as a young girl she was sold to him. For years she had believed herself heartless—of all her numerous love affairs not one had really touched her until now, and *now* he is the husband of her oldest friend ; of the one woman whom perhaps in all the world she really respects.

At times her heart smites her, and a terrible longing to go away—to die—to make an end of it—takes possession of her—at other times. She leans towards Baltimore,

her lovely eyes alight, her soft mouth smiling. Her whispered words, her only half-averted glances, all tell their tale. Presently it is clear to everyone that a very fully developed flirtation is well in hand.

Lady Baltimore coming across the grass with a basket in one hand and her little son held fondly by the other, sees and grasps the situation. Baltimore, leaning over Lady Swansdown, the latter lying back in her lounging chair in her usual indolent fashion, swaying her feather fan from side to side, and with white lids lying on the azure eyes.

Seeing it all, Lady Baltimore's mouth hardens, and a contemptuous expression destroys the calm dignity of her face. For the moment *only*. Another moment and it is gone ; she has recovered herself. The one sign of emotion she has betrayed is swallowed up by her stern determination to conceal all pain at all costs, and if her fingers tighten somewhat convulsively on those of her boy's,

why, who can be the wiser of *that*? No one can see it.

Dysart, however, who is honestly fond of his cousin, has mastered that first swift involuntary contraction of the calm brow, and a sense of indignant anger against Baltimore and his somewhat reckless companion fires his blood. He springs quickly to his feet.

Lady Baltimore, noting the action, though not understanding the motive for it, turns and smiles at him—so controlled a smile that it quiets him at once.

“I am going to the gardens to try and cajole McIntyre out of some roses,” says she, in her sweet, slow way, stopping near the first group she reaches on the lawn—the group that contains, amongst others, her husband, and——her friend. She would not willingly have stayed where they were, but she is too proud to pass them by without a word. “Who will come with me? Oh! *no*,” as several rise to join her, laughing, though rather faintly. “It is not compul-

sory—even though I go alone, I shall feel that I am equal to McIntyre.”

Lord Baltimore had started as her first words fell upon his ears. He had been so preoccupied that her light footfalls coming over the grass had not reached him, and her voice, when it fell upon the air gave him a shock. He half rises from his seat :

“ Shall I ? ” he is beginning, and then stops short, something in her face checking him.

“ *You!* ” she conquers herself a second later ; all the scorn and contempt are crushed by sheer force of will, out of look and tone, and she goes on as clearly, and as entirely without emotion, as though she were a mere machine—a thing she has taught herself to be. “ Not you,” she says gaily, waving him lightly from her. “ You are too useful here ”—as she says this she gives him the softest if fleetest smile. It is a masterpiece. “ You can amuse one here and there, whilst I—I—I want a girl, I think,” looking round. “ Bertie,”—

with a fond, an almost passionate glance at her little son—"always likes one of his sweet-hearts (and they are many) to accompany him when he takes his walks abroad."

"Like father, like son, I dessay, Ha, ha!" laughs a fatuous youth—a Mr. Courtenay—who lives about five miles from the Court, and has dropped in this afternoon, very unfortunately, it must be confessed, to pay his respects to Lady Baltimore. Fools always hit on the truth! *Why*, nobody knows, except the Heavens above us—but so it is. Young Courtenay, who has heard nothing of the unpleasant relations existing between his host and hostess, and who would be quite incapable of understanding them if he *had* heard, now springs a remark upon the assembled five or six people present, that almost reduces them to powder.

Dysart casts a murderous glance at him.

"A clever old proverb," says Lady Baltimore lightly. She is apparently the one unconcerned person amongst them. "I

always like those old sayings. There is so much truth in them."

She has forced herself to say this ; but as the words pass her lips she blanches perceptibly. As if unable to control herself she draws her little son towards her ; her arms tighten round him. The boy responds gladly to the embrace, and to those present who know nothing, it seems the simplest thing in the world. The mother—the child ; naturally they would caress each other on each and every occasion. The agony of the mother is unknown to them ; the fear that her boy, her treasure, may inherit something of his father, and in his turn prove unfaithful to the heart that trusts him.

It is a very little scene, scarcely worth recording, yet the anguish of a strong heart lies embodied in it.

"If you are going to the gardens, Lady Baltimore, let me go with you," says Miss Maliphant, rising quickly and going towards her. She is a big, loud girl, with money

written all over her in capital letters, but Dicky Browne, watching her, tells himself she has a good heart. "I should *love* to go there with you and Bertie."

"Come, then," says Lady Baltimore graciously. She makes a step forward ; little Bertie, as though he likes and believes in her, thrusts his small fist into the hand of the Birmingham heiress, and thus united, all three pass out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

“I have no other but a woman’s reason: I think him so, because I think him so.”

WHEN a corner near the rhododendrons has concealed them from view, Dysart rises from his seat and goes deliberately over to where Lady Swansdown is sitting. She is an old friend of his, and he has therefore no qualms about being a little brusque with her where occasion demands it.

“Have a game?” says he. His suggestion is full of playfulness; his tone, however, is stern.

“Dear Felix, why?” says she smiling up at him beautifully. There is even a suspicion of amusement in her smile.

“A change!” says he. His words this time might mean something, his tone anything. She can read either as she pleases.

“True !” says she laughing. “There is nothing like change. You have wakened me to a delightful fact. Lord Baltimore,” turning languidly to her companion, who has been a little *distract* since his wife and son passed by him. “What do you say to trying a change for just we two? Variety they *say* is charming ; shall we try if shade and coolness and comfort are to be found in that enchanting glade down there ?” She points as she speaks to an opening in the wood where perpetual twilight seems to reign, as seen from where they now are sitting.

“If you will,” says Baltimore, still a little vaguely. He gets up, however, and stretches his arms indolently above his head as one might who is flinging from him the remembrance of an unpleasant dream.

“The sun here is intolerable,” says Lady Swansdown, rising too. “More than one can endure. Thanks, dear Felix, for your suggestion. I should never have thought of

the glade if you hadn't asked me to play that impossible game."

She smiles a little maliciously at Dysart and, accompanied by Lord Baltimore, moves away from the assembled groups upon the lawn to the dim recesses of the leafy glade.

"*Sold !*" says Mr. Browne to Dysart. It is always impossible to Dicky to hold his tongue. "But you needn't look so cut up about it. 'Tisn't good enough, my dear fellow. I know 'em both by heart. Baltimore is as much in love with her as he is with his Irish tenants, but his imagination is his strong point and it pleases him to think he has found at last for the twentieth time a solace for all his woes in the disinterested love of somebody, it really never much matters who."

"There is more in it than *you* think," says Dysart gloomily.

"Not a fraction !" airily.

"And what of her ? Lady Swansdown ?"

"Of her ! Her heart has been in such

constant use for years that by this time it must be in tatters. Give up thinking about that. Ah ! here is my beloved girl again !” He makes an elaborate gesture of delight as he sees Joyce advancing in his direction. “*Dear Joyce !*” beaming on her, “who shall say there is nothing in animal magnetism ? Here I have been just talking about you to Dysart, and telling him what a lost soul I feel when you’re away, and instantly, as if in answer to my keen desire, you appear before me.”

“Why aren’t you playing tennis ?” demands Miss Kavanagh, with a cruel disregard of this flowery speech.

“Because I was waiting for you.”

“Well, I’ll beat you,” says she. “I always do.”

“Not if you play on my side,” reproachfully.

“What ! Have you for a *partner* ! Nonsense, Dicky, you know I shouldn’t dream of that. Why it is as much as

ever you can do to put the ball over the net."

" "'Twas ever thus,'" quotes Mr. Browne mournfully. "The sincerest worship gains only scorn and contumely. But never mind, the day will come!——"

"To an end," says Miss Kavanagh, giving a finish to his sentence never meant. "That," cheerfully, "is just what I think. If we don't have a game now, the shades of night will be on us before we can look round us."

"Will you play with me?" asks Dysart.

"With pleasure. Keep your eye on this near court, and when the game is at an end call it ours." She sinks into a chair as she speaks, and Dysart, who is in a silent mood, flings himself on the grass at her feet and falls into a reverie. To be conversational is unnecessary, Dicky Browne is on the spot.

* * * * *

Hotter and hotter grows the sun ; the evening comes on apace ; a few people from

the neighbouring houses have dropped in ; Mrs. Monkton among others, with Tommy in tow. The latter, who is supposed to entertain a strong affection for Lady Baltimore's little son, no sooner, however, sees Dicky Browne than he gives himself up to his keeping. What the attraction ~~is~~ that Mr. Browne has for children has never yet been clearly defined. It is the more difficult to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion about it, in that no child was ever yet left in his sole care for ten minutes without coming to blows, or tears, or a determined attempt at murder or suicide.

His mother, seeing Tommy veering towards this uncertain friend, turns a doubtful eye on Mr. Browne.

"Better come with me, Tommy," says she ; "I am going to the gardens to find Lady Baltimore. She will have Bertie with her."

"I'll stay with Dicky," says Tommy, flinging himself broadcast on Mr. Browne's

reluctant chest, that gives forth a compulsory "Wough" as he does so. "He'll tell me a story."

"Don't be unhappy, Mrs. Monkton," says the latter, when he has recovered from the shock—Tommy is a well-grown boy, with a sufficient amount of adipose matter about him to make his descent felt. "I'll promise to be careful. Nothing French I assure you. Nothing that could shock the young mind, or teach it how to shoot in the wrong direction. My tales are always strictly moral."

"Well, Tommy, be *good*!" says Mrs. Monkton with a last imploring glance at her son, who has already forgotten her existence, being lost in a wild wrestling match with his new friend. With deep forebodings his mother leaves him, and goes upon her way. Passing Joyce, she says in a low whisper:

"Keep an eye on Tommy."

"Both eyes if you like," laughing. "But Dicky, in spite of his evil reputation, seldom goes to extremes."

"Tommy does, however," says Mrs. Monkton tritely.

"Well—I'll look after him."

And so perhaps she might have done, had not a light step sounding just behind her chair at this moment, caused her to start—to look round—to forget all but what she now sees.

He is a very aristocratic-looking man, tall, with large limbs, and big indeed in every way. His eyes are light, his nose a handsome Roman, his forehead massive, and if not grand in the distinctly intellectual way, still a fine forehead and impressive. His hands are of a goodly size, but exquisitely proportioned, and very white, the skin almost delicate. He is rather like his sister Lady Baltimore, and yet so different from her in every way, that the distinct resemblance that is surely there, torments the observer.

"*Why!*" says Joyce. It is the most foolish exclamation and means nothing, but she finds herself a little taken off her guard.

“I didn’t know you were here !” She has half risen.

“Neither did I—How d’ye do, Dysart ?—Until half an hour ago. Won’t you shake hands ?”

He holds out his own hand to her as he speaks. There is a quizzical light in his eyes as he speaks, nothing to offend, but one can see that he finds amusement in the fact that the girl has been so much impressed by his unexpected appearance, that she has even forgotten the small usual act of courtesy with which we greet our friends. She had, indeed, been dead to everything but his coming.

“You came——” falters she, stammering a little, as she notes her mistake.

“By the mid-day train ; I gave myself just time to snatch a sandwich from Purdon (the butler), say a word or two to my sister, whom I found in the garden, and then came on here to ask you to play this next game with me.”

“Oh ! I am so sorry, but I have promised it to——”

The words are out of her mouth before she has realized the fact that Dysart is listening—Dysart, who is lying at her feet, watching every expression in her mobile face. She colours hotly, and looks down at him, confused, lovely.

“I didn’t mean—*that* !” says she, trying to smile indifferently. “Only——”

“*Don’t* !” says Dysart, not loudly, not curtly, yet in so strange and decided a way that it renders her silent. “You mustn’t mind me,” says he, a second later, in his usual calm tone. “I know you and Beauclerk are wonderful players. You can give me a game later on.”

“A capital arrangement,” says Beauclerk, comfortably, sinking into a chair beside her, with all the lazy manner of a man at peace with himself and his world, “especially as I shall have to go in presently to write some letters for the evening post.”

He places his elbows on the arms of the chair, brings the ends of his fingers together, and beams admiringly at Joyce over the tops of them.

"How busy you always are," says she, slowly.

"Well, you see, this appointment, or, rather, the promise of it, keeps me going. Tremendous lot of interest to work up. Good deal of bother, you know, but then, beggars——eh?——can't be choosers, can they? And I should like to go to the East; that is, if——"

He pauses, beams again, and looks boldly into Miss Kavanagh's eyes. She blushes hotly, and, dropping her fan, makes a little attempt to pick it up again. Mr. Beauclerk makes another little attempt, and so manages that his hand meets hers. There is a slight, an almost benevolent pressure.

Had they looked at Dysart as they both resumed their places, they could have seen that his face is white as death. Miss

Kavanagh, too, looks a little pale, a little uncertain, but as a whole nervously happy.

"I've been down at that old place of mine," goes on Mr. Beauclerk. "Terrible disrepair—take thousands to put it in any sort of order. And where's one to get them? That's the one question that has got no answer nowadays. Eh, Dysart?"

"There is an answer, however," says Dysart, curtly, not looking at him.

"Ah, well, I suppose so. But I haven't heard it yet."

"Oh, yes, I think you have," says Dysart, quite politely, but grimly, nevertheless.

"Dear fellow, how? where? unless one discovers a *mine* or an African diamond-field?"

"Or an heiress," says Dysart, incidentally.

"Hah! lucky dog, that comes home to *you*," says Beauclerk, giving him a playful pat on his shoulder, and stooping from his chair to do it, as Dysart still sits upon the grass.

"Not to me."

"No? You *will* be modest? Well, well! But, talking of that old place, I assure you, Miss Kavanagh, it worries me—it does, indeed. It sounds like one's *duty* to restore it, and still——"

"There are better things than even an old place," says Dysart.

"Ah! you haven't one, you see," cries Beauclerk, with the utmost geniality. "If you had—— I really think if you had you would understand that it requires a sacrifice to give it up to moths and rust and ruin."

"I said there were better things than old places," says Dysart doggedly, never looking in his direction. "And if there are, *make* a sacrifice."

"Pouf! Lucky fellows like you—gay soldier lads—with hearts as light as sunbeams, can easily preach; but sacrifices are not so easily made. There is that horrid word, Duty! And a man must sometimes *think!*"

Joyce, as though the last word had struck some answering chord that wounds her as it strikes, looks suddenly at him. *What* was it Barbara had said? "He was a man who would always *think*,"—is he thinking now—even now—at this moment?—is he weighing matters in his mind?

"Hah!" says Beauclerk rising and pointing to the court nearest them; "*that* game is over. Come on, Miss Kavanagh, let us go and get our scalps. I say, Dysart, will you fight it out with us?"

"No, thanks."

"Afraid?" gaily.

"Of you—no," smiling; the smile is admirably done, and would be taken as the genuine article anywhere.

"Of Miss Kavanagh, then?"

For a brief instant, and evidently against his wish, Dysart's eyes meet those of Joyce.

"Perhaps," says he.

"A poor compliment to me," says Beauclerk, with his pleasant laugh that always

rings so softly. "Well, never mind; I forgive you. Get a good partner, my dear fellow, and *she* may pull you through. You see I depend entirely upon mine," with a glance at Joyce, full of expression. "There's Miss Maliphant now—she'd make a good partner if you like."

"I shouldn't," says Dysart immovably.

"She plays a good game, I can tell you."

"So do you," says Dysart.

"Oh, now Dysart, don't be sarcastic," says Beauclerk laughing. "I believe you are afraid of me, not of Miss Kavanagh, and that's why you won't play. But if you were to put yourself in Miss Maliphant's hands, I don't say but that you would have a chance of beating me."

"I shall beat you by myself or not at all," says Dysart suddenly, and for the first time looking fair at him.

"A single, you mean?"

"Yes, a single."

"Well—we shall see," says Beauclerk. "Hah, there is Courtenay. Come along, Miss Kavanagh, we must make up a set as best we may, as Dysart is too lazy to face us."

"The next game is ours, Mr. Dysart, remember," says she, glancing at Dysart over her shoulder. There is a touch of anxiety in her eyes.

"I *always* remember," says he, with a rather ambiguous smile. What is he remembering now? Joyce's mouth takes a grave curve as she follows Beauclerk down the marble steps that lead to the tennis-ground below.

The evening has grown very still. The light wind that all day long has sung amongst the leaves, has gone to sleep. Only the monotonous countings of the tennis players can be heard. Suddenly above these, another sound arises. It is *not* the voice of the charmer. It is the voice of Tommy in full cry, and mad with a

desire to gain the better of the argument now going on between him and Mr. Browne. Mr. Browne is still, however, holding his own. He generally does. His voice grows eloquent. *All* can hear.

“I shall tell my story, Tommy, in my own way, or I shall not tell it at all!” The dignity that Mr. Browne throws into this threat is hardly to be surpassed.

CHAPTER IX.

"Sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge."

"'TISN'T right," says Tommy.

"*I* think it is. If you will kindly listen to it once again, and give your entire attention to it, you will see how faulty is the ignorant conclusion to which you have come."

"I'm not one bit ignorant," says Tommy indignantly. "Nurse says 'I'm the dickens an' all' at my Bible, and that I know Genesis better'n *she* does."

"And a very engaging book it is too," says Mr. Browne, "but it isn't everything. What *you* want to study, my good boy, is natural history. You are very ignorant about that, at all events."

"A cow *couldn't* do it," says Tommy.

"History says she can. Now, listen

again. It is a grand old poem, and I am grieved and distressed, Thomas, to find that you refuse to accept it as one of the gems of truth thrown up to us out of the Dark Ages. Are you ready?

“Diddle-dee, diddle-dee dumpty.
The cow ran up the plum-tree.
Half-a-crown to fetch her——”

“She *didn't*—’twas the *cat*,” cries Tommy.

“Not in *my* story,” says Mr. Browne, mildly but firmly.

“A cow *couldn't* go up a plum-tree,” indignantly.

“She could in *my* story,” persists Mr. Browne, with all the air of one who, even to avoid unpleasantness, would not consent to go against the dictates of his conscience.

“She *couldn't*, I tell you,” roars Tommy, now thoroughly incensed. “She couldn’t *climb*. Her horns would stick in the branches. She’d be too *heavy*!”

“I admit, Thomas,” says Mr. Browne gravely, “that your argument sounds as

though there were some sense in it. But who am I that I should dare to disbelieve ancient history? It is unsafe to throw down old landmarks, to blow up the bulwarks of our noble constitution. Beware Tommy! never tread on the tail of Truth. It may turn and rend you."

"Her name isn't Truth," says Tommy. "Our cow's name is Biddy, and she never ran up a tree in her life."

"She's young," says Mr. Browne. "She'll learn. So are *you*—*you'll* learn. And remember this, my boy, always respect old legends. A disregard for them will so unsettle you that finally you will find yourself—at the foot of the gallows in all human probability. I suppose," sadly, "that you are even so far gone in scepticism as to doubt the glorious truth of the moon's being made of green cheese?"

"Father says that's nonsense," says Tommy promptly, and with an air of triumph, "and father always knows."

"I blush for your father," says Mr. Browne with increasing melancholy. "Both he and you are apparently sunk in heathen darkness. Well, well; we will let the question of the moon go by, though I suppose you know, Tommy, that the real and original moon first rose in Cheshire."

"No, I don't," says Tommy, with a militant glare. "There was once a Cheshire cat; there never was a Cheshire moon."

"I suppose you will tell me next there never was a Cheshire cheese," says Mr. Browne severely. "Don't you see the connection? But never mind. Talking of cats brings us back to our mutton, and from thence to our cow. I do hope, Tommy, that for the future you will, at all events, *try* to believe in that faithful old animal who skipped so gaily up and down, and hither and thither, and in and out, and all about, that long-suffering old plum-tree."

"She never did it," says Tommy, stamping with rage and now nearly in tears.

“I’ve books—I’ve books, and ’tisn’t in *any* of them.”

“It is in *my* book,” says Mr. Browne, who ought to be ashamed of himself.

“I don’t believe you ever *read* a book,” screams Tommy furiously. “’Twas the cat—the cat—the cat?”

“No ; ’twas the hornèd cow,” says Mr. Browne in a sepulchral tone, whereat Tommy goes for him.

There is a wild and desperate conflict. Tooth and nail Tommy attacks the foe, fists and sturdy legs doing very gallant service. There would indeed have been a serious case of assault and battery for the next Court day, had not Providence sent Mrs. Monkton on the scene.

“Oh, Tommy !” cries she, aghast. It is presumably Tommy, though, as he has his head thrust between Mr. Browne’s legs, and his heels in mid air, kicking with all their might, there isn’t much of him by which to prove identification. And—“Oh,

Dicky," says she again, "how *could* you torment him so, when you know how easy it is to excite him. See what a state he is in !"

"And what about me?" demands Mr. Browne, who is weak with laughter. "Is no sympathy to be shown *me*? see what a state *I'm* in. I'm black and blue from head to heel. I'm at the point of death !"

"Nonsense ! you are all right, but look at *him* ! Oh Tommy, what a terrible boy you are. And you promised me if I brought you, that you—— Just look at his clothes !"

"Look at *mine* !" says Mr. Browne. "My best hat is done for, and I'm afraid to examine my trousers. *You* might tell me if there is a big rent anywhere. No ? Eh ? Well—if you won't I must only risk it. But I feel tattered and torn. By-the-bye, Tommy, that's part of another old story. I'll tell you about it some day."

"Come with me, Tommy," says his mother, with awful severity. She holds out her hand

to her son, who is still glaring at Dicky with an undying ferocity. "You are a very naughty boy and I'm sure your father will be very angry with you when he hears of this."

"Oh, but he must not hear of it, must he, Tommy?" says Mr. Browne, with decision, appealing to his late antagonist as airily, as utterly without *arrière pensée*, as though no unpleasant passages have ever occurred between them. "It's awfully good of you to desire our company, Mrs. Monkton, but really on the whole I think——"

"It is Tommy I want," says Mrs. Monkton still with a meaning eye.

"Where Tommy goes, I go," says Mr. Browne, firmly. "We are wedded to each other for the day. Nothing shall part us! Neither law nor order. Just now we are going down to the lake to feed the swans with the succulent bun. Will you come with us?"

"You are very uncertain, Dicky," says

Mrs. Monkton, regarding Mr. Browne with a gravity that savours of disapproval. "How shall I be sure that if you take him to the lake you will not let him drown himself?"

"He is far more likely to drown me," says Mr. Browne. "Come along, Tommy, the biscuits are in the hall, and the lake a quarter of a mile away. The day waneth ; let us haste—let us haste !"

"Where has Dicky gone ?" asks Joyce, who has just returned victorious from her game.

"To the lake with Tommy. I have been imploring him not to drown my son," says Mrs. Monkton with a rather rueful smile.

"Oh, he won't do that. Dicky is erratic, but pretty safe, for all that. And he is fond of Tommy."

"He teases him, however, beyond endurance."

"That is because he *does* like him."

"A strange conclusion to arrive at, surely," says Dysart, looking at her.

"No. If he didn't like him, he wouldn't take the trouble," says she, nonchalantly. She is evidently a little *distracte*. She looks as though she wanted something.

"You won your game?" says her sister, smiling at her.

"Yes, quite a glorious victory. They had only two games out of the six; and you know Miss Connor plays very well."

"Where is Mr. Beauclerk?"

"Gone into the house to write some letters and telegrams."

"Norman, do you mean?" asks Lady Baltimore, coming up at this moment, her basket full of flowers, and minus the little son, and the heiress; "he has just gone into the house to hear Miss Maliphant sing. You know she sings remarkably well, and that last song of Milton Wellings suits her so entirely. Norman is very fond of music. Have you had a game, Joyce?"

"Yes, and won it," says Joyce, smiling

back at her, though her face has paled a little. *Had* she won it?

“Well, I must take these into the house before they fade. Righton wants them for the dinner-table,” says Lady Baltimore. A little hurried note has crept into her voice. She turns away somewhat abruptly. Lord Baltimore and Lady Swansdown have just appeared in view, Lady Swansdown with a huge bunch of honeysuckle in her hand, looking very picturesque.

Baltimore, seeing his wife move towards the house, and Lady Swansdown displaying the spoils of her walk to Dysart, darts quickly after her.

“Let me carry that burden for you,” says he, laying his hand upon the basket of flowers.

“No, oh! *no*, thank you,” says Lady Baltimore, glancing up at him for just a moment, with a little curious expression in her eyes. “I have carried it quite a long time. I hardly feel it now. No; go back to the lawn to Lady Swansdown—see; she

is quite alone at this moment. You will be doing me a real service if you will look after our guests."

"As you will," says Baltimore, coldly.

He turns back with a frown, and rejoins those he had left.

Joyce is talking to Lady Swansdown in her prettiest way—she seems, indeed, exceptionally gay even for her, who, as a rule, is the life of every party. Her spirits seem to have risen to quite an abnormal height, and her charming laugh, soft as it is sweet, rings gaily. With the advent of Baltimore, however, Lady Swansdown's attention veers aside, and Joyce, feeling Dysart at her elbow, turns to him.

"We postponed *one* game, I think," says she. "Well—shall we play the next?"

"I am sorry," says he, deliberately, "but, I think not." His eyes are on the ground.

"No?" says she, colouring warmly. There is open surprise in her glance. That

he should refuse to accept an advance from her seems truly beyond belief.

“You must forgive me,” says he, deliberately still. He had sworn to himself that he would not play second fiddle on *this* occasion at all events, and he holds himself to his word. “But I feel as if I could not play to-day. I should disgrace you. Let me get you another partner. Captain Grant is out there, he——”

“Thank you. I shall be able to provide myself with a partner when I want one,” interrupts she, haughtily, turning abruptly away.

CHAPTER X.

“Nature has sometimes made a fool.”

THE fiddles are squeaking, the 'cellos are groaning, the man with the cornet is making a most ungodly row. As yet, the band have the ballroom all to themselves, and are certainly making the most of their time. Such unearthly noises rarely, if ever, have been heard in it before. Why they couldn't have tuned their instruments before coming is a question that fills the butler's mind with wrath, but perhaps the long journey down from Dublin would have untuned them all again, and left the players of them disconsolate.

The dismal sounds penetrate into the rooms right and left of the ballroom, but fail to kill the melancholy sweetness of the dripping fountains or the perfume of the hundred

flowers that give their sleeping-draughts to all those who choose to come and inhale them. Mild draughts that please the senses without stealing them.

The sounds even penetrate to the library, where Joyce is standing before the low fire, that even in this July evening, burns upon the hearth, fastening her long gloves. She had got down before the others and now, finding the room empty, half wishes herself back again upstairs. But she is so young, so full of a fresh delight in all the gaiety around her, that she had hurried over her dressing, and, with the first dismal sounds of the tuning, had turned her steps its way.

The library seems cold to her, bare, unfriendly. Had she expected to meet somebody there before her—somebody who had promised to get into a fresh tie in a hurry, but who had possibly forgotten all about it in the joy of an after-dinner cigar?

It seems a long time since that first day when she had been startled by his sudden

reappearance at the Court. A long, *long* time. Soon this last visit of hers to the Court must come to an end. The Baltimores will be going abroad in a fortnight or so—and he with them. The summer is waning—dreary autumn coming. He will go—and——.

A sense of dissatisfaction sits heavily on her, toning down to rather too cruel a degree the bright expectancy of her face. He had *said* he would come, and now——. She drums in a heavy-hearted, listless fashion on the table with the tips of her pale gloves, and noticing, half-consciously in so doing, that they have not been sufficiently drawn up her arm, mechanically fits them closer to the taper fingers.

Certainly he had said he would be here. “Early, you know. Before the others can get down.” A quick frown grows upon her forehead, and now that the fingers are quiet, the little foot begins to beat a tattoo upon the ground. Leaning against the table in a graceful attitude, with the lamplight stream-

ing on her pretty white frock, she gives a loose rein to her thoughts.

They are a little angry, a little frightened perhaps. During the past week had he not said many things, that in the end proved void of meaning. He had haunted her in a degree, at certain hours, certain times, had loitered through gardens, lingered in conservatories by her side, whispered many things—looked so very many more. But——.

There were other times, other opportunities for philandering (*she* does not give it this unpleasant name) ; how has he spent them ? A vague thought of Miss Maliphan crosses her mind. That he laughs at the plain, good-natured heiress to her (Joyce), has not prevented the fact that he is very attentive to her, at times. Principally such times as when Joyce may reasonably be supposed to be elsewhere. Human reason, however, often falls short of the mark, and there have been unsuspected moments during the past week when Miss Kavanagh has by chance appeared

upon the scene of Mr. Beauclerk's amusements, and has found that Miss Maliphant has had a good deal to do with them. But then——“That poor, good girl you know!” Here, Beauclerk's joyous laugh would ring forth for Joyce's benefit. “*Such* a good girl; and so—er—*don't* you know!” He was certainly always a little vague. He didn't explain himself. Miss Kavanagh, looking back on all he had ever said against the heiress, is obliged to confess to herself that the great “er” had had to express everything. Contempt, dislike, kindly disdain—he was always *kindly*—he made quite a point of *that*. Truly, thinks Miss Kavanagh to herself, after this retrospective glance, “er” is the greatest word in the English language!

And so it is. It declares. It conceals. It conveys a laugh. It suggests a frown. It helps a sorrowful confession. It adorns a lame one. It is kindly, as giving time. It is cruel, as being full of sarcasm. It——. In fact, what is it it *cannot* do?

Joyce's feet have grown quite steady now. She has placed her hands on the table behind her, and thus compelled to lean a little forward, stands studying the carpet without seeing it. A sense of anger, of *shame* against herself is troubling her. If he should *not* be in earnest ! If he should not—like her as she likes him !

She rouses herself suddenly as if stung by some thought. "Like" *is* the word. It has gone no deeper yet. It *shall* not. He is handsome, he has his charm, but if she is not all the world to him, why, he shall not be all the world to *her*. If it is money he craves, for the restoration of that old home of his, why money let it be. But there shall not be the two things, the desire of one for filthy lucre, the desire of the other for love. He shall decide.

She has grown very pale. She has drawn herself up to her full height, and her lips are pressed together. And now a strange thought comes to her. If—*if* she loved him, could

she bear thus to analyse him? To take him to pieces, to dissect him as it were? Once again that feeling of fear oppresses her. Is she so cold, so deliberate in herself that she suspects others of coldness? After all—if he does love her—if he only hesitates because——.

A step outside the door!

Instinctively she glances at one of the long mirrors that line the walls from floor to ceiling. Involuntarily her hands rush to her head. She gives a little touch to her gown. And now is sitting in a lounging-chair, a little pale still perhaps, but in all other respects the very picture of unconsciousness. It is—it must be——.

It isn't, however.

Mr. Browne, opening the door in his own delightfully breezy fashion that generally plays old Harry with the hinges and blows the ornaments off the nearest tables, advances towards her with arms outspread, and the liveliest admiration writ upon his features,

which to say the truth, are of goodly proportions.

“Oh ! Thou wonder of the world !” cries he in accents ecstatic. He has been reading “Cleopatra” (that most charming of books) assiduously for the past few days, during which time he has made himself an emphatic nuisance to his friends : Perpetual quotations, however apt or salutary, proving as a rule a bore.

“That will do, Dicky ! We *all* know about that,” says Miss Kavanagh, who is a little unnerved, a little impatient perhaps. Mr. Browne, however, is above being snubbed by anyone. He continues on his way rejoicing.

“Thou living flame !” cries he, making what he fondly supposes to be a stage attitude. “Thou thing of beauty. Thou *fleshpot of Egypt !*”

He has at last surpassed himself ! He stands silent waiting for the plaudits of the crowd. The crowd, however, is unappreciative.

"Nonsense !" says Miss Kavanagh shortly. "I wonder you aren't tired of *making* people tired. Your eternal quotations would destroy the patience of an anchorite. And as for that last sentence of yours, you know very well it isn't in Rider Haggard's book. He'd have been ashamed of it."

"*Would* he ? Bet you he wouldn't ! And if it isn't in his book, all I can say is it ought to have been. Mere oversight leaving it out. He *will* be sorry if I drop him a line about it. Shouldn't wonder if it produced a new edition. But for my part, I believe it *is* in the book. Fleshpots, Egypt, you know ; hardly possible to separate 'em now from the public mind."

"Well, he could separate them any way. There isn't a single word about them in the book from start to finish."

"No ? D'ye say so ?" Here Mr. Browne grows lost in thought. "Fleshpots—pots—hot pots ; hot *potting* ! Hah !" He draws himself together with all the manner of one who has gone down deep into a thing, and

come up from it full of knowledge. "I've 'mixed those babies up,' " says he mildly. "But still I can hardly believe that that last valuable addition to Mr. Haggard's work is all my own."

"Distinctly your own," with a suggestion of scorn, completely thrown away upon the receiver of it.

"D'ye say so ! By Jove ! And very neat too ! Didn't think I had it in me. After all to write a book is an easy matter ; here am I, who never thought about it, was able to form an entire sentence full of the most exquisite wit and humour without so much as knowing I was doing it. Tell you what, Joyce ; I'll send it to the author with a card and my compliments, you know. Horrid thing to be *mean* about anything, and if I can help him out with a 999th edition or so, I'll be doing him a good turn. Eh ?"

"I suppose you think you are amusing," says Miss Kavanagh, regarding him with a critical eye.

“My good child, I *know* that expression,” says Mr. Browne, amiably. “I know it by heart. It means that you think I’m a fool. It’s politer now-a-days to look things than to say them, but wait awhile and you’ll *see*. Come ; I’ll bet you a shilling to a sovereign that he’ll be delighted with my suggestion, and put it into his next edition without delay. No charge ! Given away ! The lot for a penny-three-farthings. In fact, I make it a present to him. Noble, eh ? Give it to him for *nothing* !”

“About its price,” says Miss Kavanagh thoughtfully.

“Think you so ? You are dull to-night, Jocelyne. Flashes of wit pass you by without warming you. Yet I tell you this idea that has flown from my brain is a priceless one. Never mind the door—he’s not coming yet. Attend to me.”

“*Who’s* not coming ?” demands she, the more angrily in that she is growing miserably aware of the brilliant colour that is slowly but surely bedecking her cheeks.

“ Never mind ! It’s a mere detail ; attend to *me* I entreat you,” says Mr. Browne, who is now quite in his element, having made sure of the fact that she is expecting somebody. It doesn’t matter in the least who, to Mr. Browne, expectation is the thing, wherein to catch the embarrassment of Miss Kavanagh, and forthwith he sets himself gaily to the teasing of her.

“ Attend to *what?* ” says she with a little frown.

“ If you had studied your Bible, Jocelyne, with that care that I should have expected from you, you would have remembered that for forty odd years the Israelites hankered after those very fleshpots of Egypt to which I have been alluding. Now I appeal to you, as a sensible girl, would anybody hanker after anything for forty odd years (*very* odd years as it happens), unless it was to their advantage to get it ; unless, indeed, the object pursued was *priceless* ! ”

“ You ask too much of this sensible girl,”

says Miss Kavanagh, with a carefully manufactured yawn. "Really, dear Dicky, you must forgive me if I say I haven't gone into it as yet, and that I don't suppose I shall ever *see* the necessity for going into it."

"But, my good child, you must see that those respectable people, the Israelites, wouldn't have pursued a mere shadow for forty years."

"That's just what I *don't* see. There are such a number of fools everywhere, in every age, that one couldn't tell."

"This is evasion," says Mr. Browne sternly. "To bring you face to face with facts must be my very unpleasant if distinct duty. Joyce, do you dare to doubt for one moment that I speak aught but the truth? Will you deny that Cleopatra that old serpent of the——"

"Ha—ha—ha," laughs Joyce ironically. "I wish she could hear you. Your life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase."

"Mere slip. Serpent of *old* Nile. Doesn't matter in the least," says Mr. Browne airily ;

"because she couldn't hear me as it happens. My dear girl, follow out the argument. Cleopatra, metaphorically speaking, was a fleshpot, because the world hankered after her. And—you're another."

"Really, Dicky, I must protest against your talking slang to me."

"Where does the slang come in? You're another fleshpot I meant to say—or convey—because *we* all hanker after you."

"Do you?" with rising wrath. "May I ask what hankering means?"

"You had better not," says Mr. Browne mysteriously. "It was one of the rites of Ancient Kem!"

"Now there is *one* thing, Dicky," says Miss Kavanagh, her wrath boiling over. "I won't be called names. I won't be called a *fleshpot*. You'll draw the line there if you please."

"My dear girl, why not? Those delectable pots must have been *bric-à-brac* of the most *recherché* description. O a most deli-

cate shape, no doubt. Of a pattern, tint, formation, general get up—not to be hoped for in these prosaic days.”

“Nonsense,” indignantly. She is fairly roused now, and Mr. Browne regarding her with a proud eye, tells himself he is about to have his reward at last. “You know very well that the term ‘fleshpots’ referred to what was *in* the pots, not to the pots themselves.”

“That’s all you know about it. That’s where your fatal ignorance comes in, my poor Joyce,” says he, with immense compassion. “Search your Bible from cover to cover, and I defy you to find a single mention of the contents of those valuable bits of *bric-à-brac*. Of *fleshpots*—heavy emphasis on the *pots*—all ten fingers down at once if you please—we read continually as being hankered after by the Israelites, who then, as now, were evidently avid collectors.”

“You’ve been having champagne, Dicky,” says Miss Kavanagh, regarding him with a judicial eye.

“So have you. But I can't see what that excellent beverage has got to do with the ancient Jews. Keep to the point. Did you ever hear that they expressed a longing for the *flesh* of Egypt? No. So far so good. The pots themselves were the objects of their admiration. During that remarkable run of theirs through the howling wilderness they, one and all, to a *man*, betrayed the true æsthetic tendency. They raved incessantly for the girl—I beg pardon—the *land* they had left behind them. The land that contained those priceless jars.”

“I wonder how you can be so silly,” says Miss Kavanagh disdainfully. Will he *never* go away! If he stays, and if—the other—comes——

“Silly! my good child. *How* silly! Why, everything goes to prove the probability of my statement. The taste for articles of *vertu*—for antiques—for fossils of all descriptions that characterized them then has lived to the present day. *Then* they worried after

old china, and who shall deny that now they have an overwhelming affection for old clo'?"

"Well; your folly doesn't concern me," says Miss Kavanagh, gathering up her skirts with an evident intention of shaking off the dust of his presence from her feet and quitting him.

"I am sorry that you should consider it folly," says Mr. Browne sorrowfully. "I should not have said so much about it perhaps but that I wanted to prove to you that in calling *you* a fleshpot I only meant to——"

"I won't be called that," interrupts Miss Kavanagh angrily. "It's *horrid*! It makes me feel quite *fat*! Now, once for all, Dicky, I forbid it. I won't have it."

"I don't see how you are to get out of it," says Mr. Browne, shaking his head and hands in wild deprecation. "Fleshpots were desirable articles—you're another—ergo—you're a fleshpot. See the argument?"

"No I don't," indignantly. "I see only you—and—I wish I *didn't*."

“Very rude ; *very!*” says Mr. Browne, regretfully. “Yet I entreat thee not to leave me without one other word. Follow up the argument—*do*. Give me an answer to it.”

“Not one,” walking to the door.

“That’s because it is unanswerable,” says Mr. Browne, complacently. “You are beaten, you——”

There is a sound outside the door ; Joyce with her hand on the handle of it, steps back and looks round nervously at Dicky. A quick colour has dyed her cheeks ; instinctively she moves a little to one side and gives a rapid glance into a long mirror.

“I don’t really think he could find a fault,” says Mr. Browne mischievously. “I should think there will be a good deal of hankering going on to-night.”

Miss Kavanagh has only just barely time to wither him, when Beauclerk comes hurriedly in.

CHAPTER XI.

“Thinkest thou there are no serpents in the world
But those who slide along the grassy sod,
And sting the luckless foot that presses them?
There are, who in the path of social life
Do bask their spotted skins in fortune’s sun,
And sting the soul.”

“OH, there you are,” cries he jovially.
“Been looking for you everywhere. The
music has begun; first dance just forming.
Gay and lively quadrille, you know—country
ball wouldn’t know itself without a beginning
like that. Come; come on.”

Nothing can exceed his *bonhomie*. He
tucks her hand in the most delightfully
genial, appropriative, fashion under his arm,
and with a beaming nod to Mr. Browne (he
never forgets to be civil to anybody) hurries
Joyce out of the room, leaving the astute
Dicky gazing after him with mingled feel-
ings in his eye.

"Deuce and all of a smart chap," says Mr. Browne to himself slowly. "But he'll fall through some day for all that, I shouldn't wonder."

Meanwhile Mr. Beauclerk is still carrying on a charming recitative.

"Such a *bore*!" he is saying, with heart-felt disgust in his tone. It is really wonderful how he can *always* do it. There is never a moment when he flags. He is for ever up to time as it were, and equal to the occasion. "I'm afraid you rather misunderstood me just now, when I said I'd been looking for you—but the fact is, Browne's such an ass, if he knew we had made an appointment to meet in the library, he'd have brayed the whole affair to any and every one."

"Was there an appointment?" says Miss Kavanagh, who is feeling a little unsettled—a little angry with herself perhaps.

"No—no," with a delightful acceptance of her rebuke. "You are right as ever. I was wrong. But then, you see, it gave me

a sort of joy to believe that our light allusion to a possible happy half-hour before the turmoil of the dance began, might mean something *more*—something——. Ah ! well, never mind ! Men are vain creatures ; and after all it would have been a happy half-hour to me *only* ! ”

“ Would it ? ” says she with a curious glance at him.

“ *You* know that ! ” says he, with the full and earnest glance he can turn on at a second’s notice without the slightest injury to heart or mind.

“ I don’t indeed.”

“ Oh well, you haven’t time to think about it perhaps. I found you very fully occupied when—at last—I was able to get to the library. Browne we all know is a very—er—lively companion—if rather wanting in the higher virtues.”

“ ‘ *At last,* ’ ” says she, quoting his words. She turns suddenly and looks at him, a world of enquiry in her dark eyes. “ I hate pre-

tence," says she curtly, throwing up her young head with a haughty movement. "You said you would be in the library, at such an hour, and though I did not *promise* to meet you there, still, as I happened to be dressed earlier than I believed possible I came down, and you——? Where were you?"

There is a touch of imperiousness in that last question that augurs badly for a false wooer ; but the imperiousness suits her. With her pretty chin uptilted, and that little scornful curve upon her lips, and her lovely eyes ablaze, she looks indeed "a thing of beauty." Beauclerk regards her with distinct approbation. After all—had she even *half* the money that the heiress possesses, *what* a wife she would make. And it isn't decided yet one way or the other ; sometimes Fate is kind. The day may come when this delectable creature may fall to his portion.

"I can see you are thinking hard things of me," says he reproachfully ; "but you little know how I have been passing the time I had

so been looking forward to. Time to be passed with *you*. That old Lady Blake—she *would* keep me maundering to her about that son of hers in the Mauritius ; *you* know he and I were at St. Petersburg together. I couldn't get away. You blame me—but what was I to do ? An old woman—unhappy——”

“ Oh no. You were *right*,” says Joyce quickly. How good he is after all, and how unjustly she had been thinking of him. So kind, so careful of the feelings of a tiresome old woman. How few men are like him. How few would so far sacrifice themselves.

“ Ah, you see it like that ! ” says Mr. Beauclerk, not triumphantly, but so modestly that the girl's heart goes out to him even more. How *generous* he is ! Not a word of rebuke to her for her vile suspicion of him.

“ Why, you put me into good spirits again,” says he laughing gaily. “ We must make haste I fear if we would save the first dance.”

“Oh yes—come,” says Joyce going quickly forward. Evidently he is going to ask her for the first dance! That *shows* that he prefers her to——.

“I’m so glad you have been able to sympathise with me about my last disappointment,” says Beauclerk. “If you hadn’t—if you had had even one hard thought of me I don’t know *how* I should have been able to endure what still lies before me. I am almost raging with anger, but when one’s sister is in question——”

“You mean?” says Joyce a little faintly.

“Oh, you haven’t heard. I am so annoyed myself about it, that I fancied everybody knew. You know I hoped that you would have been good enough to give me the first dance, but when Isabel asked me to dance it with that dreadful daughter of Lady Dunscombe’s, what *could* I do? Now I ask you?” appealing to her with hands and eyes.

“What *could* I do?”

“Obey, of course,” says she with an effort.

but a successful one. "You must hurry too, if you want to secure Miss Dunscombe."

"Ah ; what a misfortune it is to be the brother of one's hostess," says he, with a sort of comic despair. His eyes are centred on her face, reading her carefully, and with much secret satisfaction—rapid as that slight change upon her face had been, he had seen and noted it.

"It couldn't possibly be a misfortune to be Lady Baltimore's brother," says she smiling. "On the contrary, you are to be congratulated."

"Not just at this moment surely !"

"At this or any other moment. Ah !"—as they enter the ball-room. "The room is already fuller than I thought. Engaged, Mr. Blake ?" to Lord Blake's eldest son. "No, not for this. Yes, with pleasure."

She makes a little charming inclination of her head to Beauclerk, and laying her hand on Mr. Blake's arm, moves away with him to where a set is already forming at the end of

the room. It is without enthusiasm she takes her place, with Dysart and one of the O'Donovan girls as a *vis-à-vis*, and prepares to march, retreat, twist and turn with the best of them.

“A dull old game,” she is irreverently terming the quadrilles—that massing together of inelegant movements so dear to the bucolic mind—that saving clause for the old maids and the wall-flowers ; when a little change of position shows her the double quartette on the right hand side of the magnificent ball-room.

She had been half through an unimportant remark to Mr. Blake, but she stops short now and forgets to finish it. Her colour comes and goes. The sides are now prancing through *their* performance, and she and her partner are standing still. Perhaps—*perhaps* she was mistaken ; with all these swaying idiots on every side of her she might well have mixed up one man's partner with another ; and Miss Dunscombe (she had caught a

glimpse of her a while ago) was surely in that set on the right hand side.

She stoops forward, regardless—*oblivious*—of her partner's surprised glance, who has just been making a very witty remark, and being a rather smart young man, accustomed to be listened to, is rather taken aback by her open indifference.

A little more forward she leans ; yes, *now*—the couples part—for one moment the coast lies clear. She can see distinctly. Miss Dunscombe is indeed dancing in that set ; but *not* as Mr. Beauclerk's partner. Miss Maliphant has secured that enviable *rôle*.

Even as Joyce gazes, Beauclerk turning his head, meets her earnest regard. He returns it with a beaming smile. Miss Maliphant, whose duty it is at this instant to advance and retire and receive without the support of a chaperone the attacks of the bold, bad man opposite, having moved out of Beauclerk's sight, the latter with an expressive glance directed at Joyce, lifts his shoulders forlornly,

and gives a serio-comic shrug of his shoulders. All to show how bored a being he is at finding himself thus, the partner of the ugly heiress ! It is all done in a second. An inimitable bit of acting—but unpleasant.

Joyce draws herself up. Her eyes fall away from his ; unless the distance is too far, the touch of disdain that lies in them should have disconcerted even Mr. Beauclerk. Perhaps it has !

“ Our turn ? ” says she, giving her partner a sudden beautiful glance full of fire—of life—of something that he fails to understand, but does *not* fail to consider charming. She smiles ; she grows radiant. She is a different being from a moment ago. How could he—Blake—have thought her stupid ? How she takes up every word—and throws new meaning into it—and *what* a laugh she has ! Low—sweet—merry—music to its core !

Beauclerk in his turn finds a loop-hole through which to look at her, and is conscious of a faint feeling of chagrin. She

oughtn't to have taken it like that. To be a little pensive—a little sad—that would have shown a right spirit. Well—the night is long. He can play his game here and there. There is plenty of time in which to regain lost ground with one—to gain fresh ground with the other. Joyce will forgive him—when she hears *his* version of it.

CHAPTER XII.

“If thou canst see not, hast thou ears to hear?
Or is thy soul too as a leaf that dies?”

“WELL, after all, life has its compensations,” says Mr. Beauclerk, sinking upon the satin lounge beside Miss Kavanagh, and giving way to a rapturous sigh. He is looking very big, and very handsome. His close-cropped, eminently aristocratic head, is thrown a little back, to give full play to the ecstatic smile he is directing at Joyce.

She bears it wonderfully. She receives it indeed with all the amiable imbecility of a person who doesn't understand what on earth you are talking about. Whether this reception of his little opening speech—so carefully prepared—puzzles or nettles Mr. Beauclerk there is no way of learning. He makes no sign.

“ I thought I should never be able to get a dance with you ; you see ”—smiling—
“ when one is the belle of the evening, one grows difficult. But you *might* have kept a fifth or sixth for a poor outsider like me. An old friend too.”

“ Old friends don’t count at a dance, I’m afraid,” says she, with a smile as genial as his own ; “ though for the matter of that you could have had the first ; *no one*—hard as it may be to make you believe it—had asked the belle of the evening for that.”

This is not quite true. Many had asked for it, Dysart amongst others ; but she had kept it open for—the one who didn’t want it. However, fibs of this sort one blinks at, where pretty girls are the criminals. Her tone is delicately sarcastic. She would willingly suppress the sarcasm altogether as beneath her, but she is very angry ; and when a woman is angry there is generally somebody to pay.

“ Oh ! that *first* ! ” says he, with a gesture

of impatience. "I shan't forgive Isabel in a hurry, about that ; she ruined my evening—up to *this*. However," throwing off as if it were unpleasant memories by a shake of his head, "don't let me spoil my one good time by dwelling upon a bad one. Here I am now, at all events ; here is comfort, here is peace. The hour I have been longing for, is mine at last."

"It might have been yours considerably earlier," says Miss Kavanagh with very noteworthy deliberation, unmoved by his lover-like glances, which after all have more truth in them than most of his declarations. She sits playing with her fan, and with a face expressionless as any sphinx.

"Oh ! my *dear* girl !" says Mr. Beauclerk reproachfully, "how can you say that ! You know in one's sister's house one must—eh ? And she laid positive commands on me——"

"To dance the first dance with Miss Maliphan ?"

"Now, that's not like you," says Mr. Beauclerk very gently. "It's not just. When I found Miss Dunscombe engaged for that ridiculous quadrille, what could I do? *You* were engaged to Blake. I was looking aimlessly round me, cursing my luck in that I had not thrown up even my sister's wishes and secured before it was too late the only girl in the room I cared to dance with, when Isabel came up again. 'Not dancing,' says she; 'and there's Miss Maliphant over there, partnerless!'"

He tells all this with as genuine an air as if it was not false from start to finish.

"You *know* Isabel," says he, laughing airily; "she takes the oddest fancies at times. Miss Maliphant is her latest craze. Though what she can see in her——. A *nice* girl. Thoroughly nice—essentially *real*—a little *too* real perhaps," with a laugh so irresistible that even Miss Kavanagh against her will is compelled to join in.

"Honest all through, I admit; but as a

waltzer! Well, well, we shouldn't be too severe—but really, there, you know, she leaves *everything* to be desired. And I've been victimized not once, but twice—*three* times."

"It is nothing remarkable," says Miss Kavanagh coldly. "Many very charming girls do not dance well. It is a gift."

"A very precious one. When a charming girl can't waltz, she ought to learn how to sit down charmingly, and not oppress innocent people. As for Miss Maliphant!" throwing out his large handsome hands expressively, "*she* certainly should not dance. Her complexion doesn't stand it. Did you notice her?"

"No," icily.

"Ah, you wouldn't, you know. I could see how thoroughly well occupied *you* were! Not a thought for even an old friend; and besides you're a girl in ten thousand. Nothing petty or small about you. Now another woman would not have failed to

notice the fatal tendency towards rubicundity that marks Miss Maliphaunt's nose whenever——”

“I do so dislike discussing people behind their backs,” says Miss Kavanagh slowly. “I always think it is so *unfair*. They can't defend themselves. It is like maligning the dead.”

“Miss Maliphaunt isn't dead at all events. She is dreadfully alive,” says Mr. Beauclerk, totally unabashed. He laughs gaily. To refuse to be lectured was a rule he had laid down for his own guidance early in life. Those people who will not see when they ought to be offended have generally the best of the game.

“Would you have her dead?” asks Joyce with calm interrogation.

“I don't remember saying I would have her *any* way,” says he, still evidently clinging to the frivolous mood. “And at all events I wouldn't have her, *dancing*. It disagrees with her nose. It makes her sug-

gestive ; it betrays one into the making of bad parodies. One I made to-night when looking at her ; I couldn't resist it. For once in her life you see she was irresistible. Hear it. ' Oh ! my love's got a red, red nose ! ' Ha ! ha ! Not half bad, eh ! It kept repeating itself in my brain all the time I was looking at her."

" I thought you liked her," says Joyce, lifting her large dark eyes for the first time to his. Beautiful eyes ! a little shocked now—a little cold—almost entreating. Surely, surely, he will not destroy her ideal of him.

" You think I am censorious," says he readily, " cruel almost ; but to *you*"—with delicate flattery—" Surely I may speak to *you* as I would speak to no other. May I not ? " He leans a little forward, and compelling the girl's reluctant gaze, goes on speaking. It chafes him that she should put him on his defence ; but some *one* divine instinct within him, warns him not to break with her entirely. " Still," says

he, in a low tone, always with his eyes on hers, "I can see that you condemn me."

"Condemn you ! No ! Why should *I* be your judge ?"

"You *are* however—and my judge and jury too. I cannot bear to think that you should despise me. And all because of that wretched girl."

"I don't despise you," says the girl quickly. "If you were really despicable I should not like you as well as I do ; I am only sorry that you should say little unkind things of a girl like Miss Maliphant, who, if not beautiful, is surely to be regarded in a very kindly light."

"Do you know," says Mr. Beauclerk gently, "I think you are the one sweet character in the world." There is a great amount of belief in his tone, perhaps half of it is honest. "I never met any one like you. Women as a rule are willing to tear each other in pieces, but you—you condone all faults ; that is why, I——"

A pause. He leans forward. His eyes are eloquent ; his tongue alone refrains from finishing the declaration that he had begun. To the girl beside him however, ignorant of subterfuge, unknowing of the wiles that run in and out of society like a thread, his words sound sweet—the sweeter for the very hesitation that accompanies them.

“I am not so perfect as you think me,” says she rather sadly—her voice a little faint.

“That is true,” says he quickly, as though compelled against his will to find fault with her. “A while ago you were angry with me because I was driven to waste my time with people uncongenial to me. *That* was unfair if you like.” He throws her own accusation back at her in the gentlest fashion. “I danced with this, that, and the other person it is true, but do you not know where my heart was all the time ?”

He pauses for a moment, just long enough to make more real his question, but hardly

long enough to let her reply to it. To bring matters to a climax would not suit him at all.

“Yes, you *do* know,” says he, seeing her about to speak. “And *yet* you misjudge me. If !—if I were to tell you that I would rather be with you than with any other woman in the world, you would believe me, wouldn’t you ?”

He stoops over her, and taking her hand, presses it fondly, lingeringly. “Answer me.”

“Yes,” says Joyce in a low tone. It has not occurred to her that his words are a question rather than an asseveration. That he loves her, seems to her certain. A soft glow illumines her cheeks ; her eyes sink beneath his ; the idea that she is happy, or at all events *ought* to be happy, fills her with a curious wonderment. Do people always feel so strange, so surprised, so *unsure*, when love comes to them ?

“Yet you *did* doubt,” says Beauclerk,

giving her hand a last pressure, and now nestling back amongst his cushions with all the air of a man who has fought and conquered and has been given his reward. "Well, don't let us throw an unpleasant memory into this happy hour. As I have said," taking up her fan and idly, if gracefully waving it to and fro. "After all the turmoil of the fight it is sweet to find oneself at last in the haven where one would be."

He is smiling at Joyce—the gayest, the most candid smile in the world. Smiles become him. He is looking really handsome and *happy* at finding himself thus alone with her. Sincerity declares itself in every line of his face. Perhaps he *is* as sincere as he has ever yet been in his life. The one thing that he unquestionably does regard with interest beyond his own poor precious bones, is the exquisite bit of nature's workmanship now sitting beside him.

At this present moment, in spite of his

flattering words, his smiles and telling glances, she is still a little cold, a little uncertain, a phase of manner that renders her indescribably charming to the one watching her.

Beauclerk indeed is enjoying himself immensely. To a man of his temperament to be able to play upon a nature as fine, as honest, as pure as Joyce's is to know a keen delight. That the girl is dissatisfied, vaguely, nervously dissatisfied, he can read as easily as though the workings of her soul lay before him in broad type, and to assuage those half defined misgivings of hers is a task that suits him. He attacks it *con amore*.

"How silent you are," says he very gently, when he has let quite a long pause occur.

"I am tired, I think."

"Of me?"

"No."

"Of what then?" He has found that

as a rule there is nothing a woman likes better than to be asked to define her own feelings. Joyce, however, disappoints him.

"I don't know. Sitting up so late I suppose."

"Look here !" says he, in a voice so full of earnest emotion that Joyce involuntarily stares at him ; "*I* know what is the matter with you. You are fighting against your better nature. You are *trying* to be ungenerous. You are trying to believe what you know is not true. Tell me—*honestly* mind—are you not forcing yourself to regard me as a monster of insincerity."

"You are wrong," says she slowly. "I am forcing myself, on the contrary, to believe you a very giant of sincerity."

"And you find that difficult ?"

"Yes."

An intense feeling of admiration for her, sways Beauclerk. How new a thing to find a girl so beautiful, with so much intelligence. Surely instinct is the great lever that moves

humanity. Why has not this girl the thousands that render Miss Maliphant so very desirable? What a *bêtise* on the part of Mother Nature. Alas! it would be too much to expect from that niggardly Dame. Beauty, intelligence, wealth! All rolled into one personality. Impossible!

"You are candid," says he; his tone sorrowful.

"That is what one should always be," says she in turn.

"You are too stern a judge. How shall I convince you?" exclaims he—of *what* he leaves open—"If I were to swear——"

"Do not," says she quickly.

"Well, I won't. But Joyce!" He pauses, purposely. It is the first time he has ever called her by her Christian name, and a little soft colour springs into the girl's cheeks as she hears him. "You know," says he. "You *do* know?"

It is a question; but again what. *What* does she know? He had accredited her

with remarkable intelligence a moment ago, but as a fact the girl's knowledge of life is but a poor thing in comparison with that of the man of the world. She belies her intelligence on the spot.

"Yes, I think I do," says she shyly. In fact she is longing to believe, to be sure of this thing, that to her is so plain that she has omitted to notice that he has never put it into words.

"You will trust in me?" says he.

"Yes, I trust you," says she simply.

Her pretty gloved hand is lying on her lap. Raising it, he presses it passionately to his lips. Joyce, with a little nervous movement, withdraws it quickly. The colour dies from her lips. Even at this supreme moment does Doubt hold her in thrall!

Her face is marvellously bright and happy, however, as she rises precipitately to her feet, much to Beauclerk's relief. It has gone quite far enough he tells himself—five minutes more and he would have found himself in a

rather embarrassing position. Really these pretty girls are very dangerous.

"Come, we must go back to the ballroom," says she gaily. "We have been here an unconscionable time. I am afraid my partner for this dance has been looking for me and will scarcely forgive my treating him so badly. If I had only told him I *wouldn't* dance with him he might have got another partner and enjoyed himself."

"Better to have loved and lost," quotes Beauclerk in his airiest manner. It is *so* airy that it strikes Joyce unpleasantly. Surely after all—after—— She pulls herself together angrily. Is she *always* to find fault with him? Must she have his whole nature altered to suit her taste?

"Ah, there is Dicky Browne," says she, glancing from where she is now standing at the door of the conservatory to where Mr. Browne may be seen leaning against a curtain with his lips curved in a truly benevolent smile.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘ Now the nights are all past over
Of our dreaming, dreams that hover
In a mist of fair false things:
Night’s afloat on wide wan wings.”

“WHY, so it is ! Our *own* Dicky, in the flesh and an admirable temper apparently,” says Mr. Beauclerk. “Shall we come and interview him ?”

They move forward and presently find themselves at Mr. Browne’s elbow ; he is, however, so far lost in his kindly ridicule of the poor silly revolving atoms before him, that it is not until Miss Kavanagh gives his arm a highly suggestive pinch that he learns that she is beside him.

“ *Wough !* ” says he, shouting out this unclassic if highly expressive word without the slightest regard for decency. “ *What* fingers you’ve got. I really think you might

reserve that kind of thing for Dysart. *He'd* like it."

This is a most infelicitous speech, and Miss Kavanagh might have resented it, but for the strange fact that Beauclerk, on hearing it, laughs heartily. Well, if *he* doesn't mind, it can't matter, but how silly Dicky can be ! Mr. Beauclerk continues to laugh with much enjoyment.

"Try him !" says he to Miss Kavanagh, with the liveliest encouragement in his tone. If it occurs to her that, perhaps, lovers, as a rule, do not advise their sweethearts to play fast and loose with other men, she refuses to give heed to the warning. He is not like other men. He is not basely jealous. He knows her. He trusts her. He had hinted to her but just now, so very, very kindly that *she* was suspicious, that she must try to conquer that fault—if it is hers. And it is. There can be no doubt of that. She had even distrusted *him* !

"Is that your advice ?" asks Mr. Browne,

regarding him with a rather piercing eye. "Capital, *under the circumstances*, but rather, eh?—Has it ever occurred to you that Dysart is capable of a good deal of feeling?"

"So few things occur to me, I'm ashamed to say," says Beauclerk, genially. "I take the present moment. It is all-sufficing, so far as I'm concerned. Well; and so you tell me Dysart has feeling?"

"Yes; I shouldn't advise Miss Kavanagh to play pranks with him," says Dicky, with a pretentiously rueful glance at the arm she has just pinched so very delicately.

"You're a poor soldier!" says she, with a little scornful up-tilting of her chin. "You wrong Mr. Dysart if you think he would feel so slight an injury. What! A mere touch from *me*!"

"Your touch is deadlier than you know, perhaps," says Mr. Browne, lightly.

"What a slander," says Miss Kavanagh, who, in spite of herself, is growing a little conscious.

“ Yes ; isn’t it ? ” says Beauclerk, to whom she has appealed. “ As for me—— ” He breaks off suddenly and fastens his gaze severely on the other side of the room. “ By Jove ! I had forgotten ! There is my partner for this dance looking daggers at me. Dear Miss Kavanagh, you will excuse me, won’t you ? Shall I take you to your chaperone, or will you let Browne have the remainder of this waltz ? ”

“ I’ll look after Miss Kavanagh, if she will allow me,” says Dicky, rather drily. “ Will you ? ” with a quizzical glance at Joyce.

She makes a little affirmative sign to him, returns Beauclerk’s parting bow, and, still with a heart as light as a feather, stands by Mr. Browne’s side, watching in silence the form of Beauclerk as it moves here and there amongst the crowd. What a handsome man he is ! How distinguished ! How tall ! How big ! Every other man looks dwarfed beside him. Presently he disappears into an ante-room, and she turns to find Mr. Browne, for

a wonder, as silent as herself, and evidently lost in thought.

“What are you thinking of?” asks she.

“Of you!”

“Nonsense! What were you doing just then when I spoke to you?”

“I have told you.”

“No you haven't. What *were* you doing?”

“*Hankering!*” says Mr. Browne, heavily.

“*Dicky!*” says she indignantly.

“Well; what? Do you suppose a fellow gets rid of a disease of that sort all in a minute? It generally lasts a good month, I can tell you. But come; that ‘Beautiful Star’ of yours, that ‘shines in your Heaven so bright,’ has given you into my charge. What can I do for you?”

“Deliver me from the wrath of that man over there,” says Miss Kavanagh, indicating Mr. Blake, who, with a thunderous brow, is making his way towards her. “The last was his. I forgot all about it. Take me away, Dicky; somewhere, anywhere; I know he’s

got a horrid temper, and he is going to say uncivil things. Where" (here she meanly tries to get behind Mr. Browne) "*shall* we go."

"Right through this door," says Mr. Browne, who, as a rule, is equal to all emergencies. He pushes her gently towards the conservatory she has just quitted, that has steps leading from it to the illuminated gardens below, and just barely gets her safely ensconced behind a respectable barricade of greenery before Mr. Blake arrives on the spot they have just vacated.

They have indeed the satisfaction of seeing him look vaguely round, murmur a gentle anathema or two, and then resign himself to the inevitable.

"He's gone!" says Miss Kavanagh, with a sigh of relief.

"To Perdition!" says Mr. Browne in an awesome tone.

"I really wish you wouldn't, Dicky," says Joyce.

“Why not. You seem to think men’s hearts are made of adamant! A moment ago you sneered at *mine*, and now——By Jove! Here’s Baltimore—and alone, for a wonder.”

“Well! *His* heart is adamant!” says she softly.

“Or hers—which?”

“Of course—manlike—you condemn our sex. That’s why I’m glad I’m not a man.”

“Why? Because, if you were, you would condemn your present sex?”

“*Certainly* not! Because I wouldn’t be of an unfair, mean, ungenerous disposition for the world.”

“Good old Jo!” says Mr. Browne, giving her a tender pat upon the back.

By this time Baltimore has reached them.

“Have you seen Lady Baltimore anywhere?” asks he.

“Not quite lately,” says Dicky; “last

time I saw her she was dancing with Farnham."

"Oh—after that she went to the library," says Joyce quickly. "I fancy she may be there still, because she looked a little tired."

"Well, she had been dancing a good deal," says Dicky.

"Thanks. I daresay I'll find her," says Baltimore, with an air of indifference, hurrying on.

"I hope he will," says Joyce, looking after him.

"I hope so too—and in a favourable temper."

"You're a cynic, Dicky, under all that airy manner of yours," says Miss Kavanagh severely. "Come out to the gardens, the air may cool your brain, and reduce you to milder judgments."

"Of Lady Baltimore?"

"Yes."

"Truly I do seem to be sitting in judgment on her and her family."

“Her *family*? What has Bertie done?”

“Oh, there is more family than Bertie,” says Mr. Browne. “She has a brother, hasn’t she?”

* * * * *

Meantime Lord Baltimore, taking Joyce’s hint, makes his way to the library, to find his wife there, lying back in a huge arm-chair. She is looking a little pale. A little *ennuyée*; it is plain that she has sought this room—one too public to be in much request—with a view to getting away for a little while from the noise and heat of the ballroom.

“Not dancing?” says her husband, standing well away from her. She had sprung into a sitting posture the moment she saw him, an action that has angered Baltimore. His tone is uncivil; his remark, it must be confessed, superfluous. *Why* does she persist in treating him as a stranger? Surely, on whatever bad terms they may be, she

need not feel it necessary to make herself uncomfortable on his appearance. She had evidently been enjoying that stolen lounge, and *now*——

The lamplight is streaming full upon her face. A faint colour has crept into it. The white velvet gown she is wearing is hardly whiter than her neck and arms, and her eyes are as bright as her diamonds ; yet there is no feature in her face that could be called strictly handsome. This, Baltimore tells himself, staring at her as he is, in a sort of insolent defiance of the cold glance she has directed at him. No ; there is no beauty about that face ; distinctly bred, calm and pure, it might possibly be called charming by those who liked her, but nothing more. She is not half so handsome as—as—any amount of other women he knows, and yet——

It increases his anger towards her tenfold to know that in his secret soul she has the one face that to *him* is beautiful, and ever *will* be beautiful.

"You see ;" says she gently, and with an expressive gesture, "I longed for a moment's pause, so I came here. Do they want me?" She rises from her seat, looking very tall and graceful. If her face is not strictly lovely there is, at all events, no lack of loveliness in her form.

"I can't answer for 'they,'" says Baltimore, "but"—he stops dead short here. If he *had* been going to say anything, the desire to carry out his intention dies upon the spot. "No, I am not aware that 'they' or anybody wants you particularly at this moment. Pray sit down again."

"I have had quite a long rest already."

"You look tired, however. *Are you?*"

"Not in the least."

"Give me this dance then," says he, half mockingly, yet with a terrible earnestness in his voice.

"Give it to *you*! Thank you. No."

"Fearful of contamination?" with a smiling sneer.

"Pray spare me your jibes," says she very coldly, her face whitening.

"Pray spare me your presence, you should rather say. Let us have the truth at all hazards. A saint like you should be careful."

To this she makes him no answer.

"What!" cries he, sardonically; "and will you miss this splendid opportunity of giving a sop to your Cerberus? Of conciliating your bugbear? your *bête noire*? your *fear of gossip*?"

"I fear nothing"—icily.

"You do, however. Forgive the contradiction," with a sarcastic inclination of his head. "But for this fear of yours you would have cast me off long ago, and bade me go to the Devil as soon as—nay, the sooner the better. And indeed if it were not for the child—By the bye, do you forget I have got a hold on *him*—a stronger than yours?"

"I *forget* nothing either," returns she as icily as before; but now a tremor, barely

perceptible, but terrible in its intensity, shakes her voice.

“Hah! You need not tell me *that*. You are relentless as—well, ‘Fate’ comes in handy,” with a reckless laugh. “Let us be conventional by all means, and it is a good old simile, well worn! You decline my proposal then? It is a sensible one, and should suit you. Dance with me to-night, when all the County is present, and Mother Grundy goes to bed with a sore heart. Scandal lies slain. All will cry aloud: ‘*There they go!*’ Fast friends in spite of all the lies we have heard about them.’ Is it possible you can deliberately forego so great a chance of puzzling our neighbours?”

“I can.”

“Why, where is your sense of humour? One trembles for it! To be able to deceive them all so deliciously; to send them home believing us on good terms, a veritable loving couple”—he breaks into a curious laugh.

"This is too much," says she, her face now like death. "You would insult me ! Believe me, that not to spare myself all the gossip with which the whole world could hurt me would I endure your arm around my waist !"

His short-lived, most unmirthful mirth has died from him, he has laid a hand upon the table near him to steady himself.

"You are candid, on my soul," says he, slowly.

She moves quickly towards the door, her velvet skirt sweeping over his feet as she goes by—the perfume of the violets in her bosom reaches him.

Hardly knowing his own meaning, he puts out his hand and catches her by her naked arm, just where the long glove ceases above the elbow.

"Isabel, give me this dance," says he, a little wildly.

"No !"

She shakes herself free of him. A moment

her eyes blaze into his. "No!" she says again, trembling from head to foot. Another moment, and the door has closed behind her.

CHAPTER XIV.

“The old, old pain of earth.”

It is now close upon midnight—that midnight of the warmer months when day sets its light finger on the fringes of it. There is a sighing through the woods, a murmur from the everlasting sea, and though Diana still rides high in Heaven with her handmaiden Venus by her side, yet in a little while her glory will be departed, and her one rival, the sun, will push her from her throne.

The gleaming lamps amongst the trees are scarcely so bright as they were an hour ago, the faint sighing of the wind that heralds the morning is shaking them to and fro. A silly bird has waked, and is chirping in a foolish fashion amongst the rhododendrons, where, in a secluded path, Joyce and Dicky Browne are wandering somewhat aimlessly. Before them

lies a turn in the path that leads presumably into the dark wood, darkest of all at this hour, and where presumably, too, no one has ventured—though one should never presume about hidden corners.

“I can’t think what you see in him,” says Mr. Browne, after a long pause. “I’d say nothing if his face wasn’t so fat, but if I were you, that would condemn him for ever in my eyes.”

“I can’t see that his face is fatter than yours,” says Miss Kavanagh, with what she fondly but erroneously believes to be perfect indifference.

“Neither is it,” says Mr. Browne meekly, “but, my dear Joyce, just there lies the gist of my argument. You have condemned *me*. All my devotion has been scouted by you. I don’t pretend to be the wreck now that once by your cruelty you made me, but——”

“Oh, that will do,” says Joyce unfeelingly. “As for Mr. Beauclerk, I don’t know why you should imagine I see *anything* in him.”

“ Well, I confess I can’t quite understand it myself. He couldn’t hold a candle to—er—well, several other fellows I could name, myself *not* included, Miss Kavanagh, so that supercilious smile is thrown away. He may be good to look at, there is certainly plenty of him on which to feast the eye, but to fall in love with——”

“ What do you mean, Dicky ? What are you speaking about ? Do you *know* ? You,” with a deadly desire to insult him, “ must be in love yourself to—to *maunder* as you are doing ? ”

“ I’m not,” says Mr. Browne, “ that’s the queer part of it. I don’t know what’s the matter with me. Ever since you blighted me, I have lain fallow, as it were. I,” dejectedly, “ haven’t been in love for quite a long, *long* time now. I miss it—I can’t explain it. I can’t be well, can I ? I,” anxiously, “ I don’t *look* well, do I ? ”

“ I never saw you looking better,” with unkind force.

“ Ah ! ” sadly, “ that’s because you don’t give your attention to me. It’s *my* opinion that I’m fading away to the land o’ the leal, like old What-you-may-call-’em.”

“ If that’s the way *he* did it, it must have taken him some time. In fact, he must be still at it,” says Miss Kavanagh, heartlessly.

By this time they have come to the end of the walk, and have turned the corner. Before them lies a small grass plot surrounded by evergreens, a cosy nook not to be suspected by anyone until quite close upon it. It bursts upon the casual pedestrian, indeed, as a charming surprise. There is something warm, friendly, confidential about it—something *safe*. Beyond lies the gloomy wood, embedded in night, but here the moonbeams play. Someone with a thoughtful care for loving souls has placed in this excellent spot for flirtation a comfortable garden seat, just *barely* large enough for two, sternly indicative of being far too small for the leanest three.

Upon this delightful seat four eyes now concentrate themselves. As if by one consent, although unconsciously, Mr. Browne and his companion come to a dead stop. The unoffending seats hold them in thrall.

Upon it, evidently on the best of terms with each other, are two people. One is Miss Maliphant, the other Mr. Beauclerk. They are whispering "soft and low." Miss Maliphant is looking, perhaps, a little confused—*for her*—and the cause of the small confusion is transparent. Beauclerk's hand is tightly closed over hers, and even as Dicky and Miss Kavanagh gaze spellbound at them, he lifts the massive hand of the heiress and imprints a lingering kiss upon it.

"Come away," says Dicky, touching Joyce's arm. "Run for your life, but softly."

He and she have been standing in shadow, protected from the view of the other two by a crimson rhododendron. Joyce starts as he touches her, as one might who is roused

from an ugly dream, and then follows him swiftly, but lightly, back to the path they had forsaken.

She is trembling in a miserable fashion that enrages her against herself cruelly, and something of her suppressed emotion becomes known to Mr. Browne. Perhaps, being a friend of hers, it angers him too.

“What strange freaks moonbeams play,” says he, with a truly delightful air of saying nothing in particular. “I could have sworn that just then I saw Beauclerk kissing Miss Maliphant’s hand.”

No answer. There is a little silence, fraught with what angry grief who can tell? Dicky, who is not *all* froth, and is capable of a liking here and there, is conscious of, and is sorry for, the nervous tremour that shakes the small hand he has drawn within his arm; but he is so far a philosopher that he tells himself it is but a little thing in her life; she can bear it; she will recover from it, “and in time forget she has

been ever ill," says the good-natured sceptic to himself.

Joyce, who has evidently been struggling with herself, and has now conquered her first feeling, turns to him.

"You should not condemn the moon-beams unheard," says she, bravely, with the ghost of a little smile. "The evidence of two impartial witnesses should count in their favour."

"But, my dear child, consider," says Mr. Browne mildly. "If it had been any one *else's* hand! I could then accuse the moon-beams of a secondary offence, and say that their influence alone, which we all know is maddening, had driven him to so bold a deed. But not madness itself could inspire me with a longing to kiss *her* hand."

"She is a very good girl, and I like her," says Joyce, with a suspicious vehemence.

"So do I; so much, indeed, that I should shrink from calling her *a good girl*. It is

very damnatory, you know. You could hardly say anything more prejudicial. It at once precludes the idea of her having any such minor virtues as grace, beauty, wit, etc. Well, granted she is 'a good girl,' that doesn't give her pretty hands, does it? As a rule, I think all good girls have gigantic points. I don't think that *I'd* care to kiss Miss Maliphant's hands, even if she would let me."

"She is a very honest, kind-hearted girl," says Miss Kavanagh a little heavily. It suggests itself to Mr. Browne that she has not been listening to him.

"And a very rich one."

"I never think about that when I am with her. I couldn't."

"Beauclerk could," says Mr. Browne tersely.

There is another rather long silence, and Dicky is beginning to think he has gone a trifle too far, and that Miss Kavanagh will cut him to-morrow, when she speaks again.

Her tone is more composed, but icy enough to freeze him.

"It is a mistake," says she, "to discuss people towards whom one feels a natural antagonism. It leads one perhaps to say more than one actually means. One is apt to grow unjust. I would never discuss Mr. Beauclerk if I were you. You don't like him."

"Well," says Mr. Browne, thoughtfully, "since you put it to me, I confess I think he is about the most *rubbishy* person I ever met in my life !"

After this sweeping opinion conversation comes to a deadlock. It is not resumed. Reaching the stone steps leading to the conservatory they ascend them in silence, and reach that perfumed retreat to find Dysart on the threshold.

"Oh, *there* you are !" cries he to Miss Kavanagh. "I thought you lost for good and all !" His face has lighted up. Perhaps he feels a sense of relief at finding

her with Dicky, who is warranted harmless. He looks almost handsome, *better* than handsome! The very soul of honesty shines in his kind eyes.

“Oh! it is hard to lose what nobody wants,” says Joyce in a would-be playful tone, but something in the drawn, pained lines about her mouth belies her mirth. Dysart, after a swift examination of her face, takes her hand and draws it within his arm.

“The last was our dance,” says he.

“Speak kindly of the dead,” says Mr. Browne, beating a hasty retreat.

CHAPTER XV.

“Heigh ho ! sing heigh ho ! unto the green holly :
Most friendship is feigning, most loving is folly.”

“DID you forget it ?” asks Dysart, looking at her.

“Forget ?”

“That the last dance was mine ?”

“Oh, *was* it. I’m so sorry. You must forgive me. I——” with a feverish attempt at gaiety, “will try to make amends. You shall have this one instead, no matter to whom it may belong. Come. It is only just begun I think.”

“Never mind,” says Dysart gently. “We won’t dance this, I think. It is cool and quiet here, and you are tired.”

“Oh *so* tired,” returns she with a little sudden pathetic cry, so impulsive, so irrepressible that it goes to his heart.

“Joyce ! what is it ?” says he quickly.
“Here, come and sit down. No, I don’t want an answer. It was an absurd question. You have overdone it a little, that is all.”

“Yes, that is all !” She sinks heavily into the seat he has pointed out to her, and lets her head fall back against the cushions. “However, when you come to think of it, that means a great deal,” says she, smiling at him languidly.

“There, don’t talk,” says he. “What is the good of having a friend if you can’t be silent with him when it so pleases you. That,” laughing, and arranging the cushions behind her head, “is one for you and two for myself. I too pine for a moment when the meagre ‘yes’ and ‘no’ will not be required of me.”

“Oh, no,” shaking her head. “It is all for me and nothing for yourself !” she pauses, and putting out her hand lays it on his sleeve. “I think, Felix,” says she softly, “you are the kindest man I ever met.”

"I *told* you you felt overdone," says he, laughing again as if to hide the sudden emotion that is gleaming in his eyes. He presses the hand resting on his arm, very gently, and then replaces it in her lap. To take advantage of any little kindness she may show him now, when it is plain that she is suffering from some mental excitement, grief or anger—or both—would seem base to him.

She has evidently accepted his offer of silence, and lying back in her soft couch, stares with unseeing eyes at the bank of flowers before her. Behind her, tall, fragrant shrubs rear themselves, and somewhere behind her too, a tiny fountain is making musical tinklings. The faint, tender glow of a coloured lamp gleams from the branches of a tropical tree close by, and round it pale, downy moths are flitting—the sound of their wings as every now and then they approach too near the tempting glow, and beat them against the Japanese shade, mingles with the silvery fall of the scented water.

The atmosphere is warm, drowsy, a little melancholy. It seems to seize upon the two sitting within its seductive influence, and threatens to waft them from day dreams into dreams born of idle slumber. The rustle of a coming skirt, however, a low voice, a voice still lower whispering a reply, recalls them both to the fact that rest, complete and perfect, is impossible under the circumstances.

A little opening amongst the tall evergreens upon their right shows them Lord Baltimore once more, but this time not alone. Lady Swansdown is with him.

She is looking rather lovelier than usual, with that soft tinge of red upon her cheeks born of her last waltz, and her lips parted in a happy smile. The subdued lights of the many lamps falling on her satin gown, rest there as if in love with its beauty. It is an old shade made new, a yellow that is almost white, and has yet a tinge of green in it. A curious shade, difficult perhaps to wear with good effect, but on Lady Swans-

down it seems to reign alone, as queen of all the toilettes in the rooms to-night. She looks indeed like a perfect picture stepped down from its canvas, a very vision of delight.

She seems to Joyce watching her—Joyce who likes her—that she has grown beyond herself (or rather into her own real self) to-night. There is a touch of life, of passionate joy, of abandonment, of hope that has yet a sting in it, in all her air, and that, though not understood of the girl, is still apparent.

The radiant smile that illumines her beautiful face as she glances up at Baltimore—who is bending over her in more lover-like fashion than should be—is still making all her face a lovely fire, as she passes out of sight down the steps that lead to the lighted gardens. The steps that Joyce but just now had ascended.

The latter is still a little wrapped in wonder and admiration and some other thought

that is akin to trouble, when Dysart breaks in upon her fancies.

"I am sorry about that," says he bluntly, indicating with a nod of his head the departing shadows of the two who have just passed out. There are no fancies about Dysart. Nothing vague.

"Yes ; it is a pity," says Joyce, hurriedly.

"More than that, I think."

"Something ought to be done"—nervously.

"Yes," flushing hotly ; "I know—I know what you mean"—she had meant nothing—"but it is so difficult to know what to do, and—I am only a cousin."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of you. I wasn't, *really*," says she, a good deal shocked. "As you say, why should *you* speak, when——"

"There is Beauclerk," supplements Dysart, quickly, as if a little angry with somebody, but certainly not with her. "How can he stand by and see it?"

"Perhaps he doesn't see it," says she in

a strange tone, her eyes on the marble flooring. It seems to herself that the words are forced from her. Because—because he has——

She brings her hands tightly together, so tightly that she reduces the feathers on the fan she is holding to their last gasp. *Because* she is now disappointed in him, because he has proved himself—perhaps—unstable, deceptive to the heart's core, is she to vilify him? A thousand times, no! That would be to know herself as base as—he *may* be.

“Perhaps not,” says Dysart drily. In his secret heart this defence of his rival is detestable to him. Something in her whole manner when she came in from the garden had suggested to him the possibility that she had at last *found him out*. Dysart would have been puzzled to explain how Beauclerk was supposed to be “found out” or for what, but that he is liable to discovery at any moment on some count or counts

unknown, is one of his Christian beliefs. "Perhaps not," says he. "And yet I cannot help thinking that a matter so open to all the world, must be patent to him."

"But," anxiously, "*is* it so open?"

"I leave that to your own judgment," a little warmly. "You," with rather sharp question, "are a friend of Isabel's?"

"Yes, yes," quickly. "You know that. But——"

"But?" sternly.

"I like Lady Swansdown, too," says she, with some determination. "I find it hard to believe that she can—can——"

"Be false to *her* friend. Have you yet to learn that friendship ends where Love begins?"

"You think——?"

"That Lady Swansdown is in love with Baltimore."

"And he?"

"Oh!" contemptuously; "who shall gauge the depth of *his* heart? What can he *mean*?"

—he has risen and is now pacing angrily up and down the small space before her. “He used to be such a good fellow, and now—— Is he dead to all sense of honour, of honesty?”

“He is a man,” says Joyce coldly.

“No. I deny that. Not a true man, surely.”

“Is there a true man?” says she. “Is there any truth, any honesty to be found in the whole wide world?”

She too has risen now, and is standing with her large dark eyes fixed almost defiantly on his. There is something so strange, so wild, so unlike her usual joyous, happy self in this outburst—in her whole attitude—that Dysart regards her with an astonishment that is largely tinged with distress.

“I don’t know what is in your mind,” says he, calmly; “something out of the common has occurred to disturb you. So much I can guess, but,” looking at her earnestly, “whatever it may be, I entreat you to beat

it under. Conquer it ; do not let it conquer you. Do not let your better self, your *own* self, fail you. There must be evil in the world, but never lose sight of the fact that there is good also ; *that* must be there, just as surely. Truth, honour, honesty, are no fables ; they are to be found everywhere. If not in *this* one, then in *that*. Do not lose faith in them."

" You think me evidently in a bad way," says she, smiling faintly. She has recovered herself in part, but though she tries to turn his earnest words into a jest, one can see that she is perilously near to tears.

" You mean that I am preaching to you," says he, smiling too. " Well, so I am. What right has a girl like you to disbelieve in anything ? Why," laughing, " it can't be so very long ago since you believed in fairies, in pixies, and the fierce dragons of our childhood."

" I don't know that I am not a believer in them still," says she. " In the dragons, at all events. Evil seems to rule this world."

"Tut!" says he. "I can see I have preached in vain."

"You would have me believe in good only," says she. "You assure me very positively that *all* the best virtues are still riding to and fro, redeeming the world, with lances poised, and hearts on fire. But where am I to find them? In you?"

It is a very gentle smile she gives him, as she says this.

"Yes; so far, at least, as *you* are concerned," says he stoutly. "I shall be true and honest to you so long as my breath lives in my body. *So* much I can swear to."

"Well," says she, with a rather meagre attempt at light-heartedness; "you almost persuade me with that truculent manner of yours into believing in *you* at all events, or is it," a little sadly, "that the ways of others drive me to that belief? Well," with a sigh; "never mind how it is, *you* benefit by it, anyway."

"I don't want to force your confidence,"

says Dysart ; "but you have been made unhappy by somebody, have you not ?"

"I have not been made happy," says she, her eyes on the ground. "I don't know why I tell you that. You asked a hard question."

"I know. I should have been silent, perhaps, and yet——"

At this moment the sound of approaching footsteps coming up the steps outside, startles them.

"Joyce !" exclaims he, quickly ; "grant me one request."

"One ! You rise to tragedy !" says she, as if a little amused, in spite of the depression under which she is so evidently labouring. "Is it to be your last, your dying prayer ?"

"I hope not. Nevertheless I would have it granted."

"You have only to speak," says she, with a slight gesture that is half mocking, half kindly.

"Come with me after luncheon, to-morrow, up to St. Bridget's Hill ?"

"Is that all? And to throw such force into it. Yes, I shall like a long walk like that."

"It is not because of the walk that I ask you to go there with me," says Dysart, the innate honesty that distinguishes him, compelling him to lay bare to her his secret meaning. "I have something to say to you. You will listen?"

"Why should I not?" returns she, a little pale. He might, perhaps, have said something further, but that now the footsteps sound close at hand. A glance towards the door that leads into the fragrant night outside, from the still more perfumed air within, reveals to them two figures.

Mr. Beauclerk and Miss Maliphant come leisurely forward. The blood receding quickly to Joyce's heart, leaves her cold and singularly calm.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight.”

“Life, I know not what thou art.”

“You two ! ” cries Miss Maliphant pleasantly in her loud, good-natured voice. She addresses them as though it has been borne in upon her, by constant reminding, that Joyce and Dysart are for the best of all reasons generally to be found together. There is something not only genial, but sympathetic in her tones, something that embarrasses Dysart, and angers Joyce to the last degree. “Well, I’m glad to have met you for one moment out of the hurly-burly,” goes on the massive heiress to Joyce with the friendliest of smiles. “I’m off at cock-crow you know, and so mightn’t have had the opportunity of saying good-bye to you but for this fortunate meeting.”

“To-morrow?” says Joyce, more with the manner of one who feels she *must* say something, than from any desire to say it.

“Yes, and so early that I shall not have it in my power to bid farewell to anyone. Unless indeed,” with a glance at Beauclerk meant perhaps to be coquettish, but so elephantine in its proportions as to be almost anything in the world *but* that, “some of my friends may wish to see the sun rise.”

“We shall miss you,” says Joyce, gracefully, though with an effort.

“Just what *I’ve* been saying,” breaks in Beauclerk at this juncture, who hitherto has been looking on, with an altogether delightful smile upon his handsome face. “We shall all miss Miss Maliphant. It is not often one meets with an entirely genial companion. My sister is to be congratulated on securing such an acquisition if only for a short time.”

Joyce, lifting her eyes stares straight at him. “For a short time!” What does that mean? If Miss Maliphant is to be

Lady Baltimore's sister-in-law she will undoubtedly secure her for a life-time !

"Oh, you are too good," says Miss Maliphant giving him a playful but hurtful flick with her fan.

"Well, what would you have me say?" persists Beauclerk still lightly, with wonderful lightness in fact, considering the weight of that playful tap upon his bent knuckles. "That we shall *not* be sorry? Would you have me lie then? Fie, fie, Miss Maliphant! The truth, the truth, and nothing but the truth! At all risks, all hazards!" here he almost imperceptibly sends flying a shaft from his eyes at Joyce, who receives it with a blank stare. "We shall, I assure you, be desolated when you go, specially Isabel."

This last pretty little speech strikes Dysart as being specially neat. This putting the onus of the regret on to Isabel's shoulders. All through, Beauclerk has been careful to express himself as one who is an appreciative *friend* of Miss Maliphant's, but nothing more ;

yet so guarded are these expressions, and the looks that accompany them, that Miss Maliphant might be pardoned if she should read a warmer meaning in them.

A sensation of disgust darkens Dysart's brow.

"I must say you are all very nice to me," says the heiress complacently. Poor soul ! No doubt she believes in every bit of it ; a long course of kow-towing from the world has taught her the value of her pile. "However," with true Birmingham grace, "there's no need for howling over it. We'll all meet again I daresay, some time or other. For one thing, Lady Baltimore has asked me to come here again after Christmas ; February, I daresay."

"So glad !" murmurs Joyce rather vaguely.

"So you see," says Miss Maliphant with ponderous gaiety, "that we are all bound to put in a second good time together ; you're coming I know, Mr. Dysart, and

Miss Kavanagh is always here, and Mr. Beauclerk"—with a languishing glance at that charming person, who returns it in the most open manner—"has *promised* me that he will be here to meet me."

"Well, if I can, you know," says he, now beaming at her.

"How's that?" says the heiress, turning promptly upon him. It is strange how undesirable the very richest heiress can be at times. "Why, it's only just this instant that you told me nothing would keep you away from the Court next spring. What d'ye mean, eh?"

She brings him to book in a most uncompromising fashion; a fashion that betrays unmistakably her plebeian origin. Dysart listening, admires her for it. Her rough and ready honesty seems to him preferable to the best bred shuffling in the world.

"Did I say all that?" says Beauclerk lightly, colouring a little nevertheless as he marks the fine smile that is curling Joyce's

lips. "Why then," gaily, "if I said it, I meant it. If I hesitated about endorsing my intentions *publicly*, it is because one is never sure of happiness beforehand ; believe me, Miss Maliphant," with a little bow to her, but with a direct glance at Joyce, "*Every* desire I have is centred in the hope that next spring may see me here again."

"Well, I expect we all have the same wish," says Miss Maliphant cheerfully, who has not caught that swift glance at Joyce. "I'm sure I hope nothing will interfere with *my* coming here in February."

"It is agreed then," says Beauclerk, with a delightfully comprehensive smile, that seems to take in everyone, even the plants and the dripping fountain, and the little marble god in the corner, who is evidently listening with all his might. "We all meet here again early next year if the Fates be propitious. You, Dysart, you pledge yourself to join our circle then ?"

"I pledge myself," says Dysart, fixing a

cold gaze on him. It is so cold, so distinctly hostile, that Beauclerk grows uncomfortable beneath it. When uncomfortable, his natural bias leads him towards a special display of *bonhomie*.

"Here we have before us, a prospect to cheer the soul of any man," declares he, shifting his eyes from Dysart to Miss Maliphan.

"It cheers me certainly," responds that heavy maiden with alacrity. "I like to think we shall all meet again."

"Like the witches in Macbeth," says Joyce indifferently.

"But not so malignantly, I hope," says the heiress brilliantly, who, like most worthy people, can never see beyond her own nose. "For my part, I like *old* friends much better than new." She looks round for the appreciation that should attend this sound remark, and is gratified to find Dysart is smiling at her. Perhaps the core of that smile might *not* have been altogether to her

taste—most cores are difficult of digestion. To her, to whom all things are new, where does the flavour of the old come in?

Beauclerk is looking at Joyce.

“I hope the prospect cheers you too,” says he a little sharply, as if nettled by her determined silence, and bent on making her declare herself. “You, I trust, will be here next February?”

“Sure to be!” says she, with an enigmatical smile. “Not a jot or tittle of your enjoyment will be lost to you in the coming year. *Both* your friends—Miss Maliphant and I—will be here to welcome you when you return.”

Something in her manner, in the half defiant light in her eyes, puzzles Beauclerk. What has happened to her since last they were together? Not more than an hour ago she had seemed—er—*well*——. Inwardly he smiles complacently. But *now*. Could she? Is it possible? Was there a chance that——

"Miss Kavanagh," begins he, moving towards her. But she makes short work of his advance.

"I repent," says she, turning a lovely smiling face on Dysart. "A while ago I said I was too tired to dance. I did myself injustice. That waltz—listen to it"—lifting up eager finger—"would it not wake a hermit from his ascetic dreams? Come. There is still time."

She has sprung to her feet—life is in every movement. She slips her arm into Dysart's. *Not* understanding—yet *half* understanding, he moves with her—his heart on fire for her, his puzzlement rendering him miserable.

Beauclerk, with that doubt of what she really knows, full upon him, is wiser. Without hesitation, he offers his arm to Miss Maliphant; and—so swift is his desire to quit the scene, he passes Dysart and Joyce, the latter having paused for a moment to recover her fan.

"You see!" says Beauclerk, bending over

the heiress, when a turn in the conservatory has hidden him from the view of those behind. "I told you!" He says nothing more. It is the veriest whisper! Spoken with an assumption of merriment, very well achieved. Yet if she had looked at him, she could have seen that his smile is rather strained. But as I have said, Miss Maliphant's mind has not been trained to the higher courses.

"Yes. One can see!" laughs she happily. "And it is charming, isn't it? To find two people thoroughly in love with each other, now-a-days, is to believe in that mad old world of romance of which we read. They're very nice too, both of them. I *do* like Joyce. She's one in a thousand, and Mr. Dysart is just suited to her. They are both *thorough*! There's no nonsense about them. Now that you have pointed it out to me, I think I never saw two people so much in love with each other as they are."

Providentially, she is looking away from

him to where the Lancers is forming in the ball-room, so that the deadly look of hatred that adorns his handsome face is unknown to her.

* * * * *

Meantime, Joyce, with that convenient fan recovered, is looking with sad eyes at Dysart.

"Come ; the music will soon cease," says she.

"Why do you speak to me like that," cries he vehemently. "If you don't want to dance, why not say so to me ? Why not trust me ? Good Heavens ! if I were your bitterest enemy you could not treat me more distantly. And yet—I would die to make you happy."

"*Don't !*" she says in a little choking sort of way, turning her face from him. She struggles with herself for a moment, and then, still with her face averted, says meekly : "Thank you, then ! If you don't mind, I would rather not dance any more to-night."

“Why didn’t you say that at first?” says he, with a last remnant of reproach. “No; there shall be no more dancing to-night for either you or me. A word, Joyce!” turning eagerly towards her, “you won’t forget your promise about that walk to morrow?”

“No. No, indeed.”

“Thank you!”

They are sitting very close together, and almost insensibly his hand seeks and finds hers. It is lying idle on her lap, and lifting it, he would have raised it to his lips, but with a sharp violent action, she wrests it from him, and, as a child might, hides it behind her.

“If you would have me believe in you—— No, no, not that,” says she, a little incoherently, her voice delivering her meaning with difficulty. Dysart, astonished, stands back from her, waiting for something more; but nothing comes, except two large tears that steal heavily, painfully, down her cheeks.

She brushes them impatiently away.

“Forgive me,” she says, somewhat brokenly. “To you, who are so good to me, I am unkind, while to those who are unkind to me—— It”——trying to rally——“was a mere whim, believe me. I have always hated demonstrations of any sort, and why should you want to kiss my hand?”

“I shouldn’t,” says he. “If——” His eyes have fallen from her eyes to her lips.

“Never mind,” says she; “I didn’t understand perhaps. But, why can’t you be content with things as they are?”

“Are *you* content with them?”

“I think so. I have been examining myself, and honestly I think so,” says she a little feverishly.

“Well, I’m not,” returns he with decision. “You must give me credit for a great private store of amiability, if you imagine that I am satisfied to take things as they now exist—— between you and me!”

“You have your faults, you see, as well as another,” says she with a frown. “You

are persistent ! And the worst of it is that you are generally *right*." She frowns again, but even whilst frowning, glances sideways at him from under her long lashes, with an expression hardly uncivil. "That is the worst crime in the calendar. Be wrong *sometimes*, an' you love me, it will gain you a world of friends."

"If it could gain me your love in return I might risk it," says he boldly. "But that is hopeless I'm afraid," shaking his head. "I am too often in the wrong not to know that neither my many frailties, nor my few virtues can ever purchase for me the one good thing on which my soul is set."

"I have told you of one fault, now hear another," says she capriciously. "You are too earnest ! What," turning upon him passionately, as if a little ashamed of her treatment of him, "is the *use* of being earnest ? Who cares ? Who looks on, who gives one moment to the guessing of the meaning that lies beneath ? To be in earnest in this life, is

merely to be *mad*. Pretend, laugh, jest, do *anything* but be what you really *are*, and you will probably get through the world in a manner, if not satisfactorily to yourself, at all events to '*les autres*.' "

"You preach a crusade against yourself," says he gently. "You preach against your own conscience. You are the least deceptive person I know. Were you to follow in the track you lay out for others, the cruelty of it would kill you.

'To thine own self be true,'

And——"

"Yes, yes ; I know it all," says she, interrupting him with some irritation. "I wish *you* knew how—how unpleasant you can be. As I tell you, you are always right. That last dance—it is true—I *didn't* want to have anything to do with it ; but for all that I didn't wish to be told so. I merely suggested it as a means of getting rid of——"

"Miss Maliphaunt," says Dysart, who is

feeling a little sore. The disingenuousness of this remark is patent to her.

"No ; Mr. Beauclerk," corrects she coldly.

"Forgive me," says Dysart quickly. "I shouldn't have said that. Well," drawing a long breath, "we have got rid of both of them, and may I offer you one word of advice ? It is disinterested, because it is to my own disadvantage. Go to your room—to your bed. You are tired, exhausted. Why wait to be more so ? *Say* you will do as I suggest."

"You want to get rid of me," says she, with a little weary smile.

"That is unworthy of an answer," gravely ; "but if a 'yes' to it will help you to follow my advice, why, I will say it. Come," rising, "let me take you to the hall."

"You shall have your way," says she, rising too, and following him.

A side door leading to the ante-room on their left, and thus skirting the ballroom

without entering it, brings them to the foot of the central staircase.

"Good-night," says Dysart in a low tone, retaining her hand for a moment. All round them is a crowd separated into twos and threes, so that it is impossible to say more than the mere commonplace.

"Good-night," returns she in a soft tone. She has turned away from him, but something in the intense longing and melancholy of his eyes compels her to look back again. "Oh, you *have* been kind ! I am *not* ungrateful," says she with sharp contrition.

"Joyce, Joyce ! Let *me* be the grateful one," returns he. His voice is a mere whisper, but so fraught is it with passionate appeal that it rings in her brain for long hours afterwards.

Her eyes fall beneath his. She moves silently away. What can she say to him ?

It is with a sense of almost violent relief that she closes the door of her own room behind her, and knows herself to be at last alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ And vain desires and hopes dismayed
And fears that cast the earth in shade
My heart did fret.”

NIGHT is waning ! Diespater, Father of Day, is making rapid strides across the Heavens, creating havoc as he goes. Diana faints ! the stars grow pale, flinging, as they die, a last soft glimmer across the sky.

Now and again a first call from the birds startles the drowsy air ; the wood-dove's coo—melancholy sweet—the cheep-cheep of the robin, the hoarse cry of the sturdy crow.

“ A faint dawn breaks on yonder sedge,
And broadens in that bed of weeds ;
A bright disc shows its radiant edge.”

All things bespeak the coming morn, yet still it lingers. As Lady Swansdown and Baltimore descend the stone steps that lead to the gardens beneath, only the swift rush

of the tremulous breeze that stirs the branches, betrays to them the fact that a new life is at hand.

"You are cold?" says Baltimore, noticing the quick shiver that runs through her.

"No; not cold. It was a mere nervous sensation."

"I shouldn't have thought you nervous."

"Or fanciful?" adds she. "You judged me rightly, and yet—coming all at once from the garish lights within into this cool sweet darkness here, makes one *feel* in spite of oneself."

"In spite! Would you, then, never willingly feel?"

"Would you?" demands she in turn, very slowly.

"Not willingly, I confess. But I have been *made* to feel, as you know. And you?"

"Would you have a woman confess?" says she, half playfully. "That is taking an unfair advantage, is it not? See," pointing to a garden seat, "what a charm-

ing resting-place. Come I *will* make one confession to you—I am tired.”

“A meagre one ! Beatrice,” says he suddenly, “tell me this ? Are *all* women alike ? Do none *really* feel ? Is it all fancy—the mere idle emotion of a moment—the evanescent desire for sensation of one sort or another—of anger, love, grief, *pain*, that stirs you now and then ? Are none of these things lasting with you, are they the mere strings on which you play from time to time, because the hours lie heavy on your hands ? It seems to me——”

“It seems to *me* that you hardly know what you are saying,” says Lady Swansdown quickly. “Do you think then that women do not feel, do not *suffer*, as men *never* do ? What wild thoughts torment your brain that you should put forward so senseless a question ?—one that has been answered satisfactorily thousands of years ago. All the pain, the suffering of earth lies on the woman’s shoulders ; it has been

so from the begining—it shall be so to the end. On being thrust forth from their Eden, which suffered most do you suppose, Adam or Eve ? ”

“ It is an old story,” says he gloomily ; “ and why should you of all people back it up. You—who—— ”

“ Better leave me out of the question.”

“ You ? ”

“ I am outside your life, Baltimore,” says she, laying her hand on the back of the seat beside her, and sinking heavily into it. “ *Leave me there !* ”

“ Would you bereave me of all things,” says he, “ even my friends. I thought—I believed, that you at least—understood me.”

“ Too well ! ” says she in a low tone. Her hands have met each other and are now clasped together in her lap in a grip that is almost hurtful. Great Heavens, if he only knew—could he *then* probe, and wound, and *tempt* !

“ If you do—— ” begins he—then stops

short, and passing her, paces to and fro before her in the dying light of the moon. Lady Swansdown leaning back gazes at him with eyes too sad for tears—eyes “wild with all regret.” Oh ! if they two might but have met earlier. If this man—this one man in all the world, had been given to her, as *her* allotment.

“Beatrice !” says he, stopping short before her ; “were you ever in love ?”

There is a dead silence. Lady Swansdown sinking still deeper into the arm of the chair, looks up at him with strange curious eyes. What does he mean ? To her—to put such a question to her of all women ! Is he deaf, blind, mad—or only cruel !

A sort of recklessness seizes upon her. Well, if he doesn't know, he *shall* know, though it be to the loss of her self-respect for ever !

“Never,” says she deliberately, leaning a little forward until the moonbeams gleam

upon her snowy neck and arms. "Never—*never*—until——"

The pause is premeditated. It is eloquence itself! The light of Heaven playing on her beautiful face betrays the passion of it—the rich pallor! One hand resting on the back of the seat taps nervously upon the cold iron-work, the other—is now in Baltimore's possession.

"Until *now*?" suggests he boldly. He is leaning over her. She shakes her head. But in this negative there is only affirmation.

His hand tightens more closely upon hers. The long slender fingers yield to his pressure—*nay more*—return it; they twine round his.

"If I thought——," begins he in a low, stammering tone—he moves nearer to her, nearer still. Does she move towards him? There is a second's hesitation on *his* part, and then, their lips meet!

It is but a momentary touch, a thing of an instant, but it includes a whole world of

meaning. Lady Swansdown has sprung to her feet, and is looking at him, with eyes that seem to burn through the mystic darkness. She is trembling in every limb. Her haughty mouth is quivering, and tears—*are* there honest, real tears in those mocking eyes?

Baltimore too has risen. His face is very white, very full of contrition. That he regrets his action towards her is unmistakable, but that there is a deeper contrition behind—a sense of self-loathing, not to be appeased—betrays itself in the anguish of his eyes. *She*—that cold woman who bears his name—had accused him of falsity, *most* falsely up to this, but now—*now!* His mind has wandered far away.

There is something so wild in his expression that Lady Swansdown loses sight of herself in the contemplation of it.

“What is it, Baltimore?” asks she in a low frightened tone. It rouses him.

“I have offended you beyond pardon,” begins he, but more like one seeking for

words to say than one afraid of using them.

"I have angered you——"

"Do not mistake me," interrupts she quickly, almost fiercely. "I am not angry, I feel no anger—nothing—*nothing*—but that I am a traitor."

"And what am I?"

"Work out your own condemnation for yourself," says she, still with that feverish self-disdain upon her. "Don't ask me to help you. She *was* my friend, whatever she is now. She trusted me, believed in me. And after all——And you," turning passionately upon him, "you are doubly a traitor, you are her husband."

"In *name*!" doggedly. He has quite recovered himself now. Whatever torture his secret soul may impress upon him in the future, no one but he shall know of it.

"It doesn't matter. You belong to her, and she to you."

"That is what *she* doesn't think," returns he bitterly.

“There is one thing only to be said, Baltimore,” says she, after a slight pause. “This must never occur again. I like you, you know that. I——” she breaks off abruptly, and suddenly gives way to a sort of mirthless laughter. “It is a farce !” she says. “Consider my feeling anything. And so virtuous a thing too as remorse ! Well, as one lives, one learns. If I had seen the light for the first time in the middle of the dark ages, I should probably have ended my days as the prioress of a convent. As it is, I shouldn’t wonder if I went in for hospital nursing presently. Pshaw !” angrily, “it is useless lamenting. Let me face the truth. I have done abominably towards her so far, and the worst of it is” —with a candour that seems to scorch her— “I *know* if the chance be given me, I shall behave abominably towards her again. I shall leave to-morrow—the day after. One must invent a decent excuse.”

“Pray don’t leave on Lady Baltimore’s account,” says he slowly, “*she* would be the

last to care about this. I am less than nothing to her."

"Is your wish father to that thought?" regarding him keenly.

"No, no, I assure you. The slight fact I mention is plain to all the world I should have thought."

"It is not plain to me," still watching him.

"Then learn it," says he. "If ever she loved me, which I now disbelieve (I would that I had let the doubt creep in earlier), it was in a past that now is irretrievably dead. I suppose I wearied her; I confess"—with a meagre smile—"I once loved her with all my soul, and heart, and strength—or else she is incapable of knowing an honest affection."

"That is not true," says Lady Swansdown, some generous impulse forcing the words unwillingly through her white lips. "She *can* love! you must see that for yourself. The child is proof of it."

"Some women are like that," says he

gloomily. "They can open wide their hearts to their children, yet close it against the fathers of them. Isabel's whole life is given up to *her* child; she regards it as hers entirely; she allows me no share in him. Not," eagerly, "that I grudge the little fellow one inch of the affection she gives him. He has a father worthless enough. Let his mother make it up to him."

"Yet he loves the father best," says Lady Swansdown quickly.

"I *hope* not," hurriedly.

"He does, believe me. One can see it. That saintly mother of his has not half the attraction for him that you have. Why, look you, it is the way of the world, why dispute it? Well, well," her triumphant voice deepening to a weary whisper, "when one thinks of it all, she is not too happy." She draws her hand in a little bewildered way across her white brow.

"You don't understand her," says Baltimore frigidly. "She lives in a world of

her own. No one would dare penetrate it. Even I—her husband as you call me, in mockery—am outside it. I don't believe she ever cared for me. If she *had*, do you think she would have given a thought to that infamous story?"

"About Madame Istray?"

"Yes. You, too, heard of it then?"

"Who hasn't heard. Marian Walden was not the one to spare you." She pauses, and looks at him, with all her heart in her eyes. "*Was* there no truth in that story?" asks she at last, her words coming with a little rush.

"None. I swear it! You believe me?" He has come nearer to her and taken her hand in the extremity of this desire to be believed in by somebody.

"I believe you," says she gently. Her voice is so low, that he can catch the words only, the grief and misery in them is unknown to him. Mercifully too, the moon has gone behind a cloud, a tender preparation for an

abdication presently, so that he cannot see the two heart-broken tears that steal slowly down her cheeks. Her late agitation is telling on her now.

“That is more than Isabel does,” says he, with a laugh that has something of despair in it.

“You tell me then,” says Lady Swansdown, “that you never saw Madame Istray after your marriage?”

“Never, willingly.”

“Oh, *willingly*!”

“Don’t misjudge me. Hear the whole story, then, if you must,” cries he passionately — “though if you do, you will be the first to hear it. I am tired of being thought a liar!”

“Go on,” says she, in a low shocked tone. His singular vehemence has compelled her to understand how severe have been his sufferings. If ever she had doubted the truth of the old story that has wrecked the happiness of his married life, she doubts no longer.

“I tell you, you will be the first to hear it,”

says he, advancing towards her. "Sit down there," pressing her into the garden-seat once more. "I can see you are looking over-done, even by this light. Well—" drawing a long breath and stepping back from her—"I never opened my lips upon this subject except once before. That was to Isabel. And she"—he pauses—"she would not listen. She believed, then, all things base of me. She has so believed ever since."

"She must be a fool!" says Lady Swansdown impetuously, "she could not——"

"She did, however. She," coldly, "even believed that I could *lie* to her!"

His face has become ashen; his eyes, fixed upon the ground, seem to grow there, with the intensity of his regard. His breath seems to come with difficulty through his lips.

"Well," says he at last, with a long sigh, "it's all over! The one merciful thing belonging to the lives of us all, is, that there must come, sooner or later, an end to everything. The worst grief has its termination.

She has been unjust to me ; but you," he lifts his haggard face, "*you*, perhaps, will grant me a kindlier hearing."

"Tell it all to me, if it will make you happier," says she, very gently. Her heart is bleeding for him. Oh, if she might only comfort him in some way ! If—if that other fails him, why should not *she*, with the passion of love that lies in her bosom, restore him to the warmth, the sweetness of life. That kiss, half developed as it only was, already begins to bear fatal fruit. Unconsciously she permits herself a licence in her thoughts of Baltimore hitherto strenuously suppressed.

"There is absurdly little to tell. At that time we lived almost entirely at our place in Hampshire, and as there were business matters connected with the outlying farms round there, that had been grossly neglected during my grandfather's time, I was compelled to run up to Town almost daily. As a rule I returned by the evening train, in time for dinner, but once or twice I was so far delayed,

that it was out of my power to do it. I laugh at myself now," he looks very far from laughter as he says it, "but I assure you, the occasions on which I was compulsorily kept away from my home were——" He pauses, "oh, well, there is no use in being more tragic than one need be. They were, at least, a trouble to me."

"Naturally," says she, coldly.

"I loved her, you see," says Baltimore, in a strange, jerky sort of way, as if ashamed of that old sentiment. "She——"

"I quite understand. I have heard all about it once or twice," says Lady Swansdown, with a kind of slow haste, if such a contradiction may be allowed. That he has forgotten *her*, is evident. That *she* has forgotten nothing is more evident still.

"Well, one day, one of the many days during which I went up to Town, after a long afternoon with Goodman and Small, in the course of which they had told me they would probably require me to call at their

office to meet one of the most influential tenants at nine the next morning, I met, on leaving their office, Marchmont—Marchmont of the 10th—*you* know.”

“ Yes, I know.”

“ He and a couple of other fellows belonging to his regiment were going down to Richmond to dine. Would I come? It was dull in Town, towards the close of the season, and I was glad of any invitation that promised a change of programme—anything that would take me away from a dull evening at my club. I made no inquiries; I accepted the invitation, got down in time for dinner and—found Madame Istray was one of the guests. I——”

He hesitates.

“ Go on.”

“ You are a woman of the world, Beatrice, you will let me confess to you that there had been old passages between me and Madame Istray at one time. Nothing very special—nothing—well, I *swear* to you I

had never so much as thought of her since my marriage—nay, since my engagement to Isabel. From that hour my life had been clear as a sheet of blank paper. I had forgotten her ; I verily believe she had forgotten me, too. At that dinner I don't think she exchanged a dozen words with me. On my soul," pushing back his hair with a slow, troubled gesture from his brow, "this is the truth."

"And yet——"

"And yet," interrupting her with, now, a touch of vehement excitement, "a garbled, a most cursedly false account of that dinner was given her. It came round to her ears. She listened to it—believed in it—condemned me without a hearing. She, who had sworn, not only at the altar, but to me—to me myself that she loved me."

"She wronged you terribly," says Lady Swansdown in a low tone.

"Thank you," cries he, a passion of gratitude in his tone. "To be believed in by

some one, so thoroughly as you believe in me, is to know happiness indeed. Whatever happens, I can count on you as my friend."

"Your friend always," says she, in a very low voice—a voice somewhat broken. "Come," she says, rising suddenly and walking towards the distant lights in the house.

He accompanies her silently.

Very suddenly she turns to him, and lays her hand upon his arm.

"Be *my* friend," says she, with a quick access of terrible emotion.

Entreaty and despair are mingled in her tone.

"For ever !" returns he, fervently, tightening his grasp on her hand.

"Well," sighing, "it hardly matters. We shall not meet again for a long, long time."

"How is that ? Isabel, the last time she condescended to speak to me of her own accord," with an unpleasant laugh, "told me that she had asked you to come here again next February, and that you had ac-

cepted the invitation. She, indeed, made quite a point of it."

"Ah ! that was a long time ago."

"Weeks do not make a long time."

"Some weeks hold more than years. Yes, you are right ; she made quite a point about my coming. Well, she is always very civil."

"She has always perfect manners. She is, as you say, very civil."

"She is very proud," coldly.

"You will come ?"

"I think not. By that time you will in all probability have made it up with her."

"The very essence of improbability, I should say."

"Whilst I—shall *not* have made it up with my husband."

"One thing seems to me quite as possible as the other."

"Oh, no. Isabel is a good woman. You would do well to go back to her. Swansdown is as bad a man as I know, and that," with a mirthless laugh, "is saying a great

deal. I should gain nothing by a reconciliation with him. For one thing, an important matter, I have a great deal more money than he has, and, for another, there are no children." Her voice changes here ; an indescribable alteration not only hardens, but desolates it. "I have been fortunate *there*," she says, "if in nothing else in my unsatisfactory life. There is no smallest tie between me and Swansdown. If I could be seriously glad of anything it would be of that. I have nothing belonging to him."

"His name."

"Oh, as for *that*—*does* it belong to him ? Has he not forfeited a decent right to it a thousand times ? No ; there is nothing. If there *had* been a child he would have made a persecution of it—and so I am better off as it is. And yet, there are moments when I envy you that little child of yours. However——"

"Yet if Swansdown were to make an overture——"

"Do not go on. It is of all speculations the most useless. Do not pursue the subject of Swansdown, I entreat you. Let," with bitter meaning, "'sleeping dogs lie.'"

Baltimore laughs shortly.

"That is severe," says he.

"It is how I feel towards him—the light in which I regard him. If," turning a face to his that is hardly recognisable, so pale it is with ill-suppressed loathing, "he were lying on his death-bed and sent for me, it would *give me pleasure* to refuse to go to him."

She takes her hand from his arm and motions him to ascend the steps leading into the conservatory.

"But you?" says he surprised.

"Let me remain here a little while. I am tired. My head aches, I——"

"Let me stay with you."

"No," smiling faintly. "What I want is to be alone. To *feel* the silence. Go. Do not be uneasy about me. Believe me you will be kind if you do as I ask you."

“It is a command,” says he slowly. And slowly too he turns away.

Seeing him so uncertain about leaving her, she steps abruptly into a dark side path, and finding a chair sinks into it.

The soft breaking of the dawn over the tree tops far away seems to add another pang to the anguish that is consuming her. She covers her face with her hands.

“Oh ! if it had all been different. Two lives sacrificed ! nay, *three*. For surely Isabel cannot care for him. Oh ! if it had been *she*, she herself—what is there she could not have forgiven him. Nay, she *must* have forgiven him, because life without him would have been insupportable. If only she might have loved him honourably. If only she might ever love him—*successfully*—dishonourably ! ”

The thought seems to sting her. Involuntarily she throws up her head and courts the chill winds of dawn that sweep with a cool touch her burning forehead.

She had called *her* proud. Would she herself then be less proud? That Isabel dreads her, half-scorns her of late, is well known to her, and yet, with a very passion of pride, would dare her to prove it. She, Isabel, has gone even so far as to ask her rival to visit her again in the early part of the coming year to meet her present friends. So far that pride had carried her. But pride—was pride love? If she herself loved Baltimore, would she, even for pride's sake, entreat the woman he singled out for his attentions to spend another long visit in her country house? And if Isabel does *not* honestly love him, why then—is he not lawful prey for one who can, who *does* love him?

One—who loves *him*. But he—whom does *he* love?

Torn by some terrible thought, she starts to her feet, and as though inaction has become impossible to her, draws her white silken wrap around her, and sweeps rapidly

out of all view of the waning Chinese lamps
into the grey obscurity of the coming day
that lies in the far gardens.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Song, have thy day, and take thy fill of light
Before the night be fallen across thy way ;
Sing while he may, man hath no long delight.”

“WHAT a delicious day !” says Joyce, stopping short on the hill to take a look round her. It is the next day, and indeed far into it. Luncheon is a thing of the past, and both she and Dysart know that it will take them all their time to reach St. Bridget’s Hill and be back again for afternoon tea. They had started on their expedition in defiance of many bribes held out to them. For one thing, there was to be a reception at the Court at five ; many of those who had danced through last night having been asked to come over late in the afternoon of to-day to talk over the dance itself, and the little etceteras belonging to it.

The young members of the Monkton

family had been specially invited too, as a sort of make up to Bertie, the little son of the house, who had been somewhat aggrieved at being sent to bed without his share of the festivities on hand. He had retired to his little cot indeed with his arms stuffed full of crackers, but how could crackers and cakes and sweets console anyone for the loss of being out of bed at an ungodly hour and seeing a real, live dance ! The one thing that finally helped him to endure his hard lot was a promise on his mother's part that Tommy and Mabel Monkton should come down next day, and revel with him amongst the glorious ruins of the supper-table. The little Monktons had not come however, when Joyce left for her walk.

“Going out ? ” Lady Swansdown had said to her, meeting her in the hall, fully equipped for her excursion. “But *why*, my dear girl ? We expect those amusing Burkes in an hour or so, and the Delaneys, and——”

“ Yes, why go ? ” repeats Beauclerk, who has just come up. His manner is friendly in the extreme, yet a very careful observer might notice a strain about it, a determination to *be* friendly that rather spoils the effect. Her manner towards him last night after his interview with Miss Maliphant in the garden and her growing coldness ever since, has somewhat disconcerted him, mentally. Could she have heard, or seen, or been told of anything ? There might of course have been a little *contretemps* of some sort. People, as a rule, are so beastly treacherous ! “ You will make us wretched if you desert us,” says he with *empressement*. As he speaks he goes up to her and lets his eyes as well as his lips implore her. Miss Maliphant had left by the early train, so that he is quite unattached and able to employ his whole battery of fascinations on the subjugation of this refractory person.

“ I am sorry. Don't be more wretched than you can help ! ” says Joyce, with a

smile wonderfully unconcerned. "Always, after a dance I want a walk to clear my brain, and Mr. Dysart has been good enough to say he will accompany me."

"*Is* he accompanying you?" asks Beauclerk, with an unpardonably supercilious glance around him, as if in search of the absent Dysart.

"You mustn't think him a laggard at his post," says Miss Kavanagh, still smiling, but now in a little provoking way that seems to jest at his pretended suspicion of Dysart's constancy and dissolve it into the thinnest of thin air. "He was here just now, but I sent him to loose the dogs. I like to have them with me, and Lady Baltimore is pleased when they get a run."

"Isabel is always so sympathetic," says he with quite a new and delightful rush of sympathy towards Isabel. "I suppose," glancing at Joyce keenly, "you would not care for an additional escort? The dogs—*and* Dysart—will be sufficient?"

“Mr. Dysart and the dogs will be,” says she. “Ah ! Here he comes,” as Dysart appears at the open doorway, a little pack of terriers at his heels. “What a time you’ve been !” cries she, moving quickly to him. “I thought you would *never* come. Good-bye, Lady Swansdown ; good-bye,” glancing casually at Beauclerk. “Keep one teapot for us if you can !”

She trips lightly up the avenue at Dysart’s side, leaving Beauclerk in a rather curious frame of mind.

“Yes, she has heard something !” That is his first thought. How to counteract the probable influence of that “something,” is the second. A little dwelling upon causes and effects shows him the way. For an effect there is often an antidote !

* * * * *

“Delicious indeed !” says Dysart, in answer to her remark. His answer is, however, a little *distract*. His determination of

last night to bring her here, and compel her to listen to the honest promptings of his heart is still strong within him.

They have now ascended the hill, and, standing on its summit, can look down on the wild deep sea beneath them that lies, to all possible seeming, as calm and passive at their feet as might a thing inanimate.

Yet within its depths what terrible—what mournful tragedies lie ! And, as if in contrast, what ecstatic joys. To one it speaks like death itself—to another :

“ The bridegroom sea
Is toying with the shore, his wedded bride,
And in the fulness of his marriage joy
He decorates her tawny brow with shells,
Retires a pace to see how fair she looks,
Then, proud, runs up to kiss her.”

“ Shall we sit here ? ” says Dysart, indicating a soft mound of grass that overlooks the bay. “ You must be tired after all last night’s dancing.”

“ I *am* tired,” says she, sinking upon the

soft cushion that Nature has provided, with a little sigh of satisfaction.

"Perhaps I should not have asked—have extracted—a promise from you to come here," says Dysart, with contrition in his tone. "I should have remembered you would be overdone, and that a long walk like this——"

"Would be the very thing to restore me to a proper state of health," she interrupts him, with the prettiest smile. "No, don't pretend you are sorry you brought me here. You know it is the sheerest hypocrisy on your part. You are glad that you brought me here, I hope, and *I*"—deliberately—"am glad that you brought me."

"Do you mean that?" says Dysart gravely. He has not seated himself beside her, and is now looking down at her from a very goodly height. "Do you know why I brought you?"

"To bring me back again as fresh as a daisy," suggests she, with a laugh that is spoiled in its birth by a glance from him.

"No, I did not think of you at all. I thought only of myself," says Dysart, speaking a little quickly now. "Call that selfish if you will—and yet——"

He stops short, and comes closer to her. "To think in that way was to think of you too. Joyce, there is at all events one thing you *do* know—that I love you."

Miss Kavanagh nods her head silently.

"There is one thing, too, that *I* know," says Dysart, now with a little tremble in his voice, "that you do not love me!"

She is silent.

"You are honest," says he, after a pause. "Still"—looking at her, "if there wasn't hope one would die. Though the present is empty for me, I cannot help dwelling on the thought that the future may contain *something!*"

"The future is so untranslatable," says she with a little evasion.

"Tell me this, at least," says Dysart, very earnestly, bending over her with the air of

one determined to sift his chances to the last grain, "you like me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Better than Courtenay, for example?" with a fleeting smile, that fails to disguise the real anxiety he is enduring.

"What an absurd question!"

"Than Dicky Browne?"

"Yes."

But here she lifts her head and gazes at him in a startled way, that speaks of quick suspicion. There is something of entreaty, too, in her dark eyes, a desire that he will go no farther.

But Dysart deliberately disregards it.

"Than Beauclerk?" asks he in a clear, almost cruel, tone.

A horrible red rushes up to dye her pretty cheeks, in spite of all her efforts to subdue it. Great tears of shame and confusion suffuse her eyes. One little reproachful glance she casts at him and then:

"Of course," says she, almost vehemently,

if a little faintly, her eyes sinking to the ground.

Dysart stands before her as if stricken into stone. Then the knowledge that he has hurt her pierces him with a terrible certainty, overcomes all other thoughts, and drives him to repentance.

"I shouldn't have asked you that," says he, bluntly.

"No, no!" says she, acquiescing quickly, "and yet," raising an eager, lovely face to his, "I hardly know why not. I hardly know *anything* about—about myself. Sometimes I think I like him, and sometimes——" She stops abruptly and looks at him with a pained and frightened gaze. "Do you despise me for betraying myself like this?"

"No—I want to hear all about it."

"Ah! That is what I want to hear myself. But who is to tell me? Nature won't. Sometimes I hate *him*. Last night——"

"Yes, I know. You hated him last night."

I don't wish to know why. I am quite satisfied in that you did so."

"But shall I hate him to-morrow? Oh, yes, I think so—I *hope* so," cries she, suddenly. "I am tired of it all. He is not a *real* person, not one possible to class. He is false—naturally treacherous—and yet——"

She breaks off again very abruptly, and turns to Dysart as if for help.

"Let us forget him," she says, and then in a little frightened way, "Oh, I wish I could be sure I could forget him!"

"Why can't you?" says Dysart, in his downright way. "It means only a strong effort after all. If you feel *honestly*," with an earnest glance at her, "like that towards him, you must be mad to give him even a corner in your heart."

"That is it," says she, "there the puzzle begins. I don't know if he even *has* a corner in my heart. He attracts me, but attraction is not affection, and the heart holds only love

and hatred. Indifference is nothing—a mere minor feeling.”

“You can get rid of him finally,” says Dysart boldly, “by giving yourself to me. That will kill all——”

All *he* may be going to say is killed on his lips at this moment, by two little wild shrieks of joy that sound right behind his head. Both he and Joyce turn abruptly in its direction—he with a sense of angry astonishment, she with a fell knowledge of its meaning. It is, indeed, no surprise to her when Tommy and Mabel appear suddenly from behind the rock just close to them, that hides the path in part, and precipitate themselves into her arms.

“We saw you, we saw you!” gasps Tommy, breathless from his run up the hill, “we saw you far away down there on the road, and we told Bridgie” (the maid) “that we’d run up and see you, and she said ‘cut along,’ so here we are.”

“You are, indeed,” says Dysart, with feeling.

"We knew you'd be glad to see us," goes on Tommy to Joyce, in the beautiful roar he always adopts when excited, "you haven't been home for years, Mary says, and Bridgie says that's because you are going to be married to——"

"Get up, Tommy, you are too heavy, and besides, I want to kiss Mabel," says Tommy's aunt with prodigious haste and a hot cheek.

"But mammy says you're a silly-Billy," says Mabel in her shrill treble, "an' that——"

"Mammy is a shockingly rude person," says Mr. Dysart, hurrying to break into the dangerous confidence, no matter at what cost, even at the expense of the adored mammy. His remark is taken very badly.

"She's *not*!" says Tommy, glowering at him. "Father says she's an angel, and *he* knows. I heard him say it, and angels are never rude!"

"'Twas after he made her cry about something," says Mabel, lifting her little flower-

like face to Dysart's in a miniature imitation of her brother's indignation. "She was boo-hooing like anything, and then father got sorry—oh !—*dreadful* sorry—and he said she was an angel, and she said——"

"Oh, Mabel !" says Joyce, weakly, "you *know* you oughtn't to say such——"

"Well, 'twas your fault ! 'twas all about you," says Tommy, defiantly. "Why don't you come home ? Father says you ought to come, and mammy says she doesn't know which of 'em it'll be ; and father says it won't be any of them, and—what's it all about ?" turning a frankly inquisitive little face up to hers. "They wouldn't tell us, and *we* want to know which of 'em is it to be."

"Yes, an' is it jints ?" demands Mabel, who probably means giants, and not cold meats.

"I don't know what she means," says Miss Kavanagh, coldly.

"I say you two," says Mr. Dysart brilliantly, "wouldn't you like to run a race ?

Bridget must be tired of waiting for you, down there at the end of the hill, and——”

“She isn’t waiting, she’s talking to Mikey Daly,” says Tommy.

“Oh, I see. Well look here. I bet you, Tommy, strong as you look, Mabel can outrun you down that hill.”

“She! *she!*” cries Tommy indignantly, “I could beat *her* in a minute.”

“You can’t,” cries Mabel in turn; “Nurse says I’m twice the chile that you are.”

“Your legs are as short as a pin,” roars Tommy, “you *couldn’t* run.”

“I can, I *can*, I CAN!” says Mabel, on the verge of a violent flood of tears.

“Well, we’ll see,” says Mr. Dysart, who now begins to think he has thrown himself away on a silly Hussar regiment, when he ought to have taken rank as a distinguished diplomatist. “Come, I’ll start you both down the hill, and whichever reaches Bridget first, wins the day.”

Instantly both children spring to the front of the path.

"You're standing before me, Tommy."

"No, I'm not."

"You're cheating—you *are*!"

"*Cheating yourself!* Mr. Dysart, amn't I all right?"

"I think you should give her a start; she's the *girl*, you know," says Dysart. "*There* now, go. That's very good. Five yards, Tommy, is a small allowance for a little thing like Mabel. Steady now, you two! One—— Good gracious, they're off," says he turning to Miss Kavanagh with a sigh of relief mingled with amusement. "They had no idea of waiting for more than *one* signal. I hope they will meet this Bridget, and get back to their mother safely."

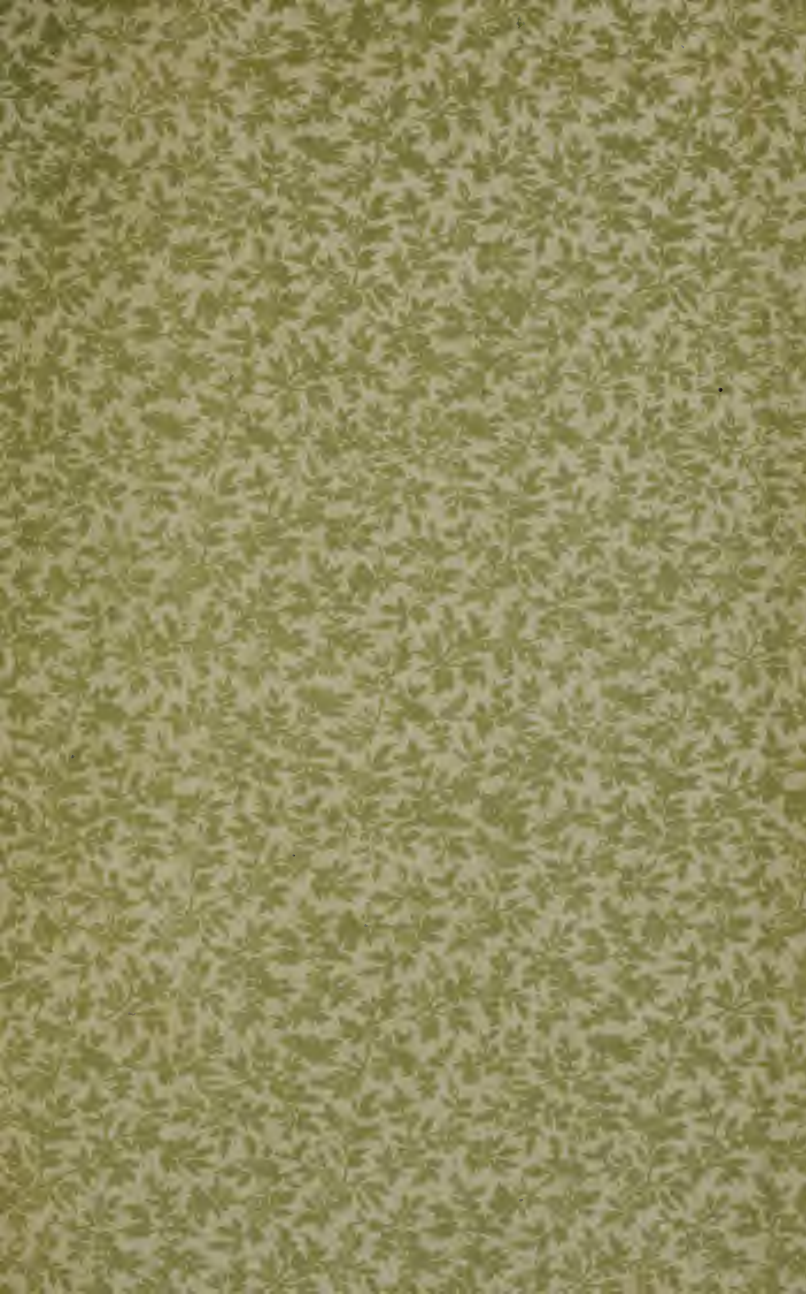
"They are not going to her just now. They are going on to the Court to spend the afternoon with Bertie," says Joyce; "Barbara told me so, last night. Dear things! How sweet they looked!"

“They are the prettiest children I know,” says Dysart—a little absent, perhaps. He falls into silence for a moment or two, and then suddenly looks at her. He advances a step.

END OF VOL. I.

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